



The policy on accessible collective transport in Lyon and Stuttgart : social pressures, political will, technical constraints and local culture



SYNTHESIS

Background of this research study

This research was partially funded by Predit (programme of research, experimentation and innovation in land transport of the French State) as a response to a 2003-call to tender named "Achieve accessible and designed for all transport". It also falls within the scope of the general research programme of the French National Institute for Transport and Safety Research (INRETS) which aims at analysing, understanding and improving the transport conditions of people with disabilities and people with reduced mobility. This programme has several components:

- analysing social, organisational, political, legal and economic context,
- analysing the real conditions of transport of people with reduced mobility and their mobility practices,
- developing methodologies to evaluate environments,
- and giving ergonomic skills to actors who develop technological solutions aiming at removing or reducing "disabling situations".

When this research was submitted, the reform of the French law had been set on the Government agenda. A new law was promulgated on February 11, 2005. This law aims at improving the social participation of people with disabilities and people with reduced mobility. This goal will be achieved through the modification of their transport conditions and their living environment. The assessment of transport accessibility has already been drawn up on several occasions. On the whole the situation is quite unsatisfactory. Indeed the 1975-law of "orientation in favour of the handicapped people" had stated the right to transport for all users, namely for handicapped people. However if some achievements have been made, much remains to be done.

Thus, with the new law, significant changes were expected in the transportation field, as henceforward transport systems had to be usable by all the French citizens, whatever their abilities. The objective of this research was to understand the context in which the new law was going to lie and to identify the conditions of its full effectiveness.

Problematics and methodology

The research objective was to analyse and to clarify the social, administrative, legal and technical mechanisms which contribute (in a positive or a negative way) to the full accessibility of the travel chain. The field of this research was thus focused on the collective transport systems and on the travel chains including several systems of collective transport. In order to determine the specificity of the national practices and to reveal cultural features, we chose to carry out a comparative approach. Two cities were studied: one in France (Lyon) and another in Germany (Stuttgart). The study of a French and a German city offers the opportunity of examining the implementation of national policies using different instruments but with the same will to favour the mobility of people with disabilities. Indeed the level of transport accessibility observed in Lyon and Stuttgart reveals the national ambition for accessible transport and the effectiveness of national laws. Moreover, France and Germany represent two

remarkable study areas because of the diversity of the technological solutions implemented there. In their respective countries, the metropolis of Lyon and Stuttgart are characterised by the dynamism of their transport systems and by the implementation of innovative solutions.

Our research materials were quite various and used complementary sources. Thus, we examined legal texts which define national and local policies of accessibility, some administrative acts produced by local governments and research reports of previous studies already undertaken on the Lyon and Stuttgart areas. Semi-directing interviews were conducted with main local actors. Lastly, direct observation was the third type of data used: we visited transport networks in order to assess the level of accessibility of both transport systems and the availability of the solutions ensuring travel accessibility. In Stuttgart, these observations also provided numerous occasions to dialog with bus and light rail operators and other agents of exploitation, to collect information on their inter-personal skills and their attitudes regarding people with disabilities and to apprehend how, in their daily work, they deal with accessibility to people with disabilities.

Results: Accessibility, a public problem under the influence of various requirements and constraints

Observations and analysis showed that both in Lyon and in Stuttgart, the needs for the people with disabilities are integrated into each new project of these networks. Moreover a programme is currently implemented for adapting existing infrastructures. The “accessibility to transport for people with disabilities” public problem is now set on the institutional agenda of the transport authorities of Lyon and Stuttgart.

The examination of the situations of Lyon and Stuttgart highlights differences between the two transport networks but also interesting similarities. The differences can be explained by legal, cultural, social, technical and sometimes historical factors. Within the framework of this synthesis, we will briefly present the main items which are developed in more detail in the research report. The latter relate mainly to:

- *The accessibility of the stations and light rail transit* – Since its rail-bound transport network is much extended, the transport authority of Stuttgart was particularly concerned with the retrofitting of the light rail “Stadtbahn” stations. 164 stations out of 177 are declared accessible. Moreover, the gap between the vehicle and the platform was reduced to facilitate the boarding of the wheelchair users. This goal is not completely reached in any circumstance. In Lyon almost all the stations of the subway network are accessible to people with disabilities. But the problem of the gap between the platform and the vehicle is not yet solved on three of the four lines of the network.
- *Tactile walking surface indicators for blind or partially sighted people* – In Lyon tactile walking surface indicators respected standard P98-351 produced by AFNOR (French normalisation organisation). Their single function is to warn the people with visual impairment in risky areas (platforms, crossroads). In Stuttgart, tactile walking surface indicators have the double function of guidance and warning. Moreover the Stuttgart tactile walking surface indicators have a typology

which varies greatly. This fact comes from the successive programmes of improvements of Stadtbahn stations. These successive programmes have given opportunities to experiment different types of tactile pavement. This example reveals the impact of the administrative structure of the two countries: in a State with a decentralised organisation such as France, local governments generally prefer to wait before acting, until the central State produces technical standards. In a federal country like Germany each local government invents and validates its own solutions.

- *The boarding devices of the urban buses* – In Lyon the ramps are electric and they are deployed under the control of the driver. In Stuttgart, the ramps are manual and are theoretically deployed by the driver. But they are actually deployed, most of the time, by any bus user or by an accompanying person of the passenger with disabilities. In the first case, the public problem of the boarding of wheelchair users is only under the responsibility of the transport authority and its transport operator. In the second case, repeated practices have produced a social rule: the boarding/alighting of wheelchair users has from now a collective responsibility, shared between the public authority and the Society.
- *The choice of coupling the high-floor vehicles with high-level platforms (900 mm) in Stuttgart rather than the low-floor vehicles and the low-level platforms in Lyon* – This choice could be explained by several subjacent and linked factors: first of all pragmatic reasons (to decrease the gaps and to facilitate boarding/alighting phases without repurchasing new vehicles which will have complex design, manufacturing and maintenance), but also the adoption of an attractiveness policy in favour of collective transport and against individual cars, the preservation of tram lines in the German cities after the Second World War and lastly the will to assert an ambitious urban policy. However reproducing such an architectural choice would be very delicate nowadays, even considering that the question does not arise in the Stuttgart downtown area where there is an underground section of the light rail Stadtbahn network.
- *Will and practices of optimizing intermodal interfaces* – This policy, observed everywhere in Germany, is particularly strong in Stuttgart. The walking travel distances are shorter, which really helps people with reduced mobility, who are particularly disadvantaged by long walking distances.
- *Involvement and structuring of associations for/of people with disabilities* – the examination of the situations of Lyon and Stuttgart does not make it possible to disprove or confirm the assumption that the atomisation of the organisations of/for people with disabilities is an obstacle to the adoption of an ambitious public policy. Indeed, in the two studied areas, clusters of organisations of/for people with disabilities have been created. However the public policy is not systematically elaborated and negotiated between these clusters and the transport authority. Indeed, as soon as a technical device affects more particularly, even exclusively, a type of impaired people, the transport operator or the transport authority are accustomed to consulting the relevant organisations directly.

The impact of national initiatives is significant. Thus, in Germany, since 1991, projects benefit from federal State grants only if they integrate the needs of people

with disabilities. Such a measurement has an impact on behaviours of the various local actors. This lever was first used in France in 2001 for light rail transit and was extended to all the projects of public transport by the law of February 11, 2005. The higher the State subsidies, the more this measurement is effective. Its effectiveness disappears if the State is financially disengaged.

The analysis of the accessibility policies in Lyon and Stuttgart highlights the fact that the elaboration and the adoption of a law strongly orient and structure the provision of transport services as well as the representations of the actors. Indeed, the concept of specialised transport services for handicapped people as a component of the public service is only developed in France. The law n°75-534 of June 30, 1975 led the French policy to distinguish two different population categories and two accessibility solutions: collective public transport adjustment for autonomous handicapped people, and the creation of specialised transport services for heavily impaired people and for those who are not autonomous. In Lyon a specialised transport service was set up in 1976 by GIHP, an organisation of people with disabilities. The transport authority of Lyon took back the financial and political responsibility for managing the specialised transport service in 1980. The transport authority was financially helped by the State, which filled the first two years of the running deficit. These two dichotomies - specialised transport service versus accessible conventional service and autonomous people versus heavily impaired people - formatted the local policy and the actors' representations. However the more progress was made on the conventional transport network, the less the budget allocated to the specialised transport service was legitimate. The local authority was then obliged to redefine the role of its STS. It has become a service with a limited role, reserved only for people with disabilities who cannot use the conventional transport network, even if it has become accessible. The transport authority has used several levers to keep this service in this role: service eligibility, service criteria, costs paid by the customers and the type of contract signed between the transport authority and the transport operator.

The signs addressed by the State to the local governments – whatever their natures (laws, regulations, subsidies or speech) – can succeed in orienting the behaviours and actions at a local level. However their impact depends on the type of policy and on the mode of control used: a law like the French one of June 30, 1975, which is ambiguous because it privileges a double means of action and which does not have an effective monitoring and supervising system, appears less effective than the German law on the financing of the local public transport. This latter law acts only on the conditions of attribution of subsidies. In the same way, the absence of technical specifications was prejudicial to the French policy, even if this shortage was partially eased by technical standards and recommendations produced by official organisations. However, these standards and recommendations, which were not binding, were generally the object of negotiation between the various local actors.

The advocates of accessibility to transport of people with disabilities succeeded in setting it on the political agenda of transport authorities. However, other public problems have the legitimacy to be treated by public authorities. Local governments have little financial room for manoeuvre. However our time is marked by a withdrawal of State funding, in France and to a lesser extent in Germany. Consequently local political actors must arbitrate between multiple requests. Some local governments

are not able to pay a million euros to raise the platforms of a S-Bahn station or nearly thirteen million euros to install lifts in all the subway stations. A temporal spreading out is thus necessary, even if the policy decision of adapting existing conventional transport network can be made very quickly. Such a constraint carried some weight on the levels of transport accessibility observed in Lyon and in Stuttgart. It will conserve a crucial importance in the future.

The local policy of transport accessibility for people with disabilities is thus the result of a set of local and national constraints and influences. It materialises into technical – or human - devices the ambition of integrating people with disabilities into the Society of the political actors and their employees.

The results of this research project suggest that any in-depth study on the transport accessibility policy for people with disabilities must examine the following aspects:

- The objectives of this public policy and its targeted public.
- The description of the decided and implemented measures.
- The national laws and regulations but also the other policy instruments used (fiscal and economic instruments, agreement-based and incentive instruments, informative instruments and communications, standards and technical recommendations) which orient and influence the action of local actors.
- The claims of the people with disabilities and the way in which the problems and the claims are formulated. The structuring of the Civil Society and the repertory of legitimate actions of pressure groups must also be questioned.
- The development process of the public policy at a local level. This requires analysing the action of all the public, or private, authorities which are involved in this policy. It is essential to enter into each organisation and to reveal the institutional or interpersonal relations which can exist between them. The mode of coordination of their actions, if it exists, must be put forward. All the stakes and constraints of the local actors must be identified: they might be financial, organisational, legal, of expertise, exploitation, etc.
- The technological offer available at the international, national and local levels. Close attention must thus be paid to the previous technological choices, especially if the technical solutions were developed at a local level. These past choices can influence the alternatives imagined by local actors.
- Sensitivity of the local actors with regards to the disability and people with disabilities. It can be related to the personal and private history of local actors. But it can also be a “spill-over effect” of another local policy in favour of people with disabilities (education, leisure, etc). The presence of specialised facilities which accommodate people with disabilities must be particularly examined. This sensitivity can also be obtained via a specific training of all the actors concerned with the chain of travel: elected officials, their employees, bus drivers, and staff of civil engineering companies.

All these factors act on the contents and the scope of the local policy in favour of accessible transport for people with disabilities – their effects can add up to or neutralise themselves...



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