

”Is Transport Behaviour During Corona Sustainable?”



Elisa Bin, research engineer at ITRL, tells us more about ITRL’s ongoing COVID-19 research.

This interview is based on the upcoming ITRL paper:

“The trade-off behaviours between virtual and physical activities during COVID-19 pandemic period”

Can you tell us about the background of the study?

The reason that we started the project was that we noticed how the COVID pandemic affected daily lives and the global economy and wanted to use our backgrounds as researchers to try to understand how people’s lives have been affected and how they’ve changed. In particular we wanted to look at how digital solutions have been used to help people coping with the lockdown.

Then once we started developing the survey and talking with people, we realised of course that within different social demographics and different social economic groups, the lockdown has had very different effects. We really wanted to see how this happened, and the goal for the future is to understand how we coped with this crisis, what we can learn from it, and then how we can apply this knowledge to the climate crisis, focussing of course on transportation as that is what we work with.

Why did you feel that this is the right approach?

We wanted to reach as many people as possible and we thought that it would be very interesting to reach people in different countries as well, since different countries have been affected in different ways. We thought that a survey would be a quick way to get a lot of information from different people.

How many different countries were involved?

We have had around 800 answers so far, half of which are from Italy. The other half is spread between Sweden, India, China, the US and many more. 23 countries in total.

What do you hope to achieve with the study?

The first thing we were curious about was to understand how people changed their behaviour; if this was more or less sustainable and if people think they will keep their new behaviours, or if they will go back to the old ones. We tried to ask questions that touch on different aspects of life; personal life, sports, hobbies, working life, travel, use of internet etc.

How did you design the study?

We decided to use a survey as the format and have most of the questions as closed questions, so multiple choice, but some open questions too, which is very interesting to allow people more space to explain themselves.

Half of the survey is dedicated to transportation; commuting, traveling and so on. The main focus is on how people did things before and how they are doing it now, if they can do the same things.

There is a section dedicated to shopping, for example grocery shopping and online shopping, and that is to see if people switched to online shopping or which kind of shopping has been cut down on due to the crisis. There is also a section dedicated to the perceived risks so that we could understand how people perceived certain activities. For example, do people think that taking the train is dangerous or not, as that could affect the transportation of the future because if people are still scared of taking public transport that could be a potential problem. We also asked about new habits and if people think they will keep the new habits or go back and do something differently?

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Can you give an overview of what you have learned so far?

As one could expect, there has been a big increase in the use of internet and the use of online meetings. That has opened up other questions, for example, if you are at work internet is provided by your workplace, but if you work from home that is not the case. What are the possible implications? Of course we noticed that public transport use has decreased a lot, almost disappeared. Instead, many people are using cars to move around. This difference is of course greater in countries in which people could not use public transport at all.

However, the first reflections come from data until the 18th May. We want to see if there are differences in the later data we received.

Have there been any suprising results?

One thing was related to take away food. We expected more food deliveries, but from the data it seems that people are cooking more!

What else could this research lead to?

We definitely would like to publish the results we have so far, but it would be interesting to look into how we go back to “normal” and what the new normal is that we are creating right now.

It would also be interesting to see if there are social groups that have been disadvantaged. For example, with the increased use of internet, there may be many that don't have internet at home, and for kids this could be a problem. This is very interesting. Related solely to transportation, I feel that public transport will change a lot. For example, in Italy there are now fewer spaces in public transport but still many passengers. We could better understand how this will affect the travel behaviour of those people.

You can fill out the survey [here](#), or feel free to [contact Elisa](#) if you have any questions regarding the study.

