



A comparative study of the organization of alternative transport in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Dakar



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 29 August 2014

Keywords:

Urban public transport
Alternative transport
Cooperatives
Solidarity-based economy

ABSTRACT

Since 1990s, various authors have described the alternative transport on different continents and particularly in developing countries. The model is typified by technological, operational and regulatory diversity within regions and countries and even by different formats within the same region.

The declining productivity of the traditional operators and the process of globalization have been identified as the main reasons for the growing participation of these operators. But these new operators are not only taking advantage of the existing inefficiency and new market situations to consolidate and expand their services. Unique functional aspects of their operations also help to explain their insertion within the urban passenger transport market.

The aim of this article is to examine the different production means and learn lessons from a comparison of the different organizational formats for urban public transport services provided by individual owners of small vehicles.

The study focused on two organizational structures, represented by cooperatives of small-scale operators: Cooperativa de Transporte (Transport Cooperative), based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and GIE – Groupement d'Intérêts Économiques (Economic Interests Group), of Dakar, Senegal. Through the study, one can conclude that increasing productivity and improving the service offered to the user does not just depend on the operators setting up organizations to support the production; there are also other factors and models that determine the effectiveness and quality of the service provided.

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1. Introduction

The urban public transport system has changed since the 90s, with the rapid growth of low-capacity vehicles in passenger transportation, competing fiercely with the conventional bus transportation and winning a substantial portion of the market share.

In many African countries, especially those that were colonized by the French, a number of traditional bus operators have gone bankrupt or been privatized. In this context, 90% of public transport services are provided by independent operators, (Godard, 2002), which has affected the dynamics of the cities, interfering in economic (through fare changes), political (through non-compliance with labor laws) and road infrastructure (through road expansion to facilitate traffic flow) matters.

Alternative transport has arisen in Dakar to fill the gaps left by the conventional bus services and is the only transportation option for those living in peripheral areas, where there were no conventional transport services. Attempts were made at first to restrict the alternative services, as they were badly organized, but in time they were tolerated, due to the large number of passengers they carried. When efforts to regulate the system failed, as a result of the lack of coordination within the public administration, the transport system's planning and coordination body decided to restructure the sector, requiring operators to organize themselves in GIEs – *Groupements d'Intérêts Économiques* (Economic Interests Groups), so that the operations would be coordinated, with the determining of lines and frequencies (Thiam, 2008).

Although the GIEs are not the same as a typical cooperative, they work according to cooperative principles. These organizations are set up by private individuals or public or private legal entities for the purpose of ensuring the provision of services that are of common interest, in order to gain market share or remain competitive by means of technological innovation, even though the use of technical means for exploitation of the service is on an individual basis.

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The Brazilian situation is similar. For historical reasons, public bus transportation services have tended to be concentrated in the private sector, which over the decades gained increasing influence over the pertinent authorities and regulation of the sector. Alternative transport options arose, during the 1990s, on the fringes of the formal regulation of transport in the main Brazilian cities, as a result of inefficiencies in the conventional transport system, reflected in fare increases and rigid and inefficient networks (Orrico Filho et al., 2007).

These new services gained the support of the users and established themselves as alternative means of transport for urban travel. This raised concerns on the part of transport administrative bodies and bus entrepreneurs and these were addressed in two ways. Initially, police repression was seen as a valid way of restricting the illegal operators and then, later, fiscal control and regulation was used to curb illegal operations and raise barriers against new entrants (Barboza, 2002). Thus, tendering processes and regulations governing the operation of the services were seen as a priority, leading independent operators to organize themselves into associations, mostly in the form of cooperatives, in order to comply with the legislation governing the sector and to generate economies of scale and maintain competitiveness.

In Dakar, alternative transport services are the predominant mode and account for two thirds of the 1.1 million daily trips on public passenger transportation, including the various taxi services (Godard, 2005). In the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area, as in all large cities and towns in Brazil, the alternative transport services have only a small market share. In this region, the demand for alternative transport services amounts to 674,000 passengers a day, equivalent to just 6% of the total demand in the public passenger transport sector.

This paper does not address the advantages and disadvantages of choosing the alternative transport option compared to other forms of public passenger transport, notably the urban bus system. The focus of the work is a comparative analysis of the two different forms of organization and management of alternative transport services: the cooperative system of Rio de Janeiro and the GIE system in Dakar.

A lack of knowledge about the situation of the associations, the way the operations are organized and their relations with the public authorities have rarely been examined in depth, which has perhaps led to a gap between the goals and proposals for improvement of this public service. Within this context, the aim of the study is to describe the transport service provided by independent operators using low-capacity vehicles, with the focus on their associative entities. To this end, the study focuses on two organization structures: a Brazilian cooperative of alternative transport operators, the *Cooperativa de Transporte do Rio de Janeiro*, and the GIE Darou Salam Transport in Dakar, Senegal.

2. Methodology

The methodology begins by bringing out the core elements related to the topic: the principal features of an informal economy; aspects of a solidarity-based economy and its organizational models; and urban public transport systems using low-capacity vehicles. These core elements related to the topic are presented in the following sub-sections.

Surveys were then carried out, based on these core elements, in order to understand the prevailing situation and be able to define the production format of these operators within the two environments being studied. The methodology used in the surveys was the semi-structured interview, chosen because of its flexibility and greater freedom for the interviewees to reveal their knowledge of the situation and for the interviewers to conduct the interview according to a predetermined script, which means they are not

required to have any great previous knowledge of the sector. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person at the Rio de Janeiro Cooperative and by e-mail, with the support of INRETS – Institut national de recherche sur les transports et leur sécurité (National Institute for Transport and Safety Research). The picture of the prevailing situation, obtained from the semi-structured interviews, is presented in Section 3.

2.1. Main features of the informal economy

The informal economy comprises production units that, despite having lawful purposes, are dependent on illicit means. There is no inherent criminal content, as the activities are lawful and convenient for the country, but illicit means are used to perform the task, such as non-compliance with legal regulations, standards or labor rights and non-payment of taxes.

Economic informality is, according to Cacciamali (2000), a reflection of an ongoing process of structural change in society and the economy that brings about a redefining of production relationships, the way workers are inserted within the system of production, work processes and institutions, from which arises two labor market phenomena:

- Reformatting of labor relations, forms of production organization and of the labor market in the formal economy.
- New working formats, such as self-employment and other survival strategies, undertaken by people who encounter difficulties in obtaining re-employment or in entering the labor market, or simply from choice.

The production units in this segment differ from production units in the formal segment. They are ‘nano’, micro or small enterprises in which the relations between capital and labor are not so easily defined. The business owner performs the simultaneous functions of employer and employee and there is no clear separation between the management and production activities. Employees are hired without consideration for the prevailing legislation. Because of the use of technological adaptations and a low level of productivity, workers are exposed to a working environment that is often unhealthy and their working hours are long (Cacciamali, 2000).

According to Cross et al. (2001), there is intensive exploitation within these production units, involving two predominant and distinct categories of worker: the self-employed and unregistered wage earners. These categories have different organizational attributes and their employment and income levels are determined by different mechanisms.

- The self-employed are informal employers and freelance workers who work directly in the production or provision of a service and may engage family members or employees in this process. The reasoning underlying their performance in the market is to obtain an income that ensures the survival of their household and they do not have the express aim of accumulating wealth or obtaining a market return, particularly because they have neither the capital nor the organization that would provide them with the necessary support.
- Unregistered wage earners are usually hired without consideration for the labor market regulations and as a result they do not enjoy any of the guarantees provided in the labor legislation.

Moreover, Cacciamali (2000) points out that, in times of economic, political and social crisis, certain informal activities can capture market share through workers selling their products in niche markets where larger companies are unable to compete, thereby providing for their survival but with no guarantee of future

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