

# **BACHELOR THESIS**

BSc Philosophy of a Specific Discipline

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**An anthro-phenomenological evaluation of the differences in perception of shared mobility services in London and São Paulo.**

MariaVictoria Garcia (490970)

**Name supervisor:** Dr. Jos de Mul

**Name advisor:** Dr. Tim de Mey

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## Introduction

The interaction between separate human subjects always necessarily entails an interaction of differing cultural norms. Each individual is unique and identifies with a different set of traditions: this is even more evident now that we live in a postmodern world.<sup>1</sup> We are being faced with the option to choose our traditions, meaning that at a every point in our life we absorb new, or give up beliefs that we used to hold. This makes it difficult to define our cultural identities.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, developments in our external environment can lead to an internal turmoil in individuals while they attempt to adapt to them. An example of catalytic events in our social sphere are Socially Disruptive Technologies (SDT's).<sup>3</sup> Once implemented, they have repercussions both on the technological sphere, as well political and economic consequences. Shared mobility platforms belong into this category as they propose a new formalized business model.<sup>4</sup> Since their introduction, they promise to reduce impact on the environment, ensure lower traffic congestion and often facilitate urban mobility. Shared mobility encompasses vehicles such as cars, bicycles, mopeds and scooters: all of which can be rented out to be used within a certain geographical area.

Shared mobility can provide many benefits to urban environments, nevertheless it is not always welcomed or rejected to the same extent depending on the country one is looking at. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be using London and São Paulo as case studies. A research paper by social anthropologist Anna Zavaylova, will be used as the theoretical blueprint for this reflection.<sup>5</sup> As traditionally perceived, the two cities differ greatly in terms of culture. The different degrees of Individualism might be a reason why respondents perceive the idea of sharing a conventionally private mode of transportation, such as a car, differently.<sup>6</sup> Historical traditions, gender roles and public infrastructure are also different.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis, therefore, aims to critically reflect on individual cultural identity and the extent to which it is shaped by the introduction of SDT's such as shared mobility platforms, in the social landscape. The three questions I will address are:

1. How do human beings, living in a society, relate to each other in an intersubjective world?
2. How do disruptive technological platforms affect the Lifeworld and human social dimensions?
3. How can the anthro-phenomenological analysis of the Lifeworld be used to interpret the differences in reaction to the disruptive introduction of shared mobility in London and São Paulo?

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<sup>1</sup> Jos de Mul, "Database Identity: Personal and Cultural Identity in the Age of Global Datafication", *Crossroads in New Media, Identity and Law*, ed. Wouter de Been, Payal Arora, and Mireille Hildebrandt (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 105, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137491268\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137491268_6).

<sup>2</sup> Michiel de Lange, "Moving Circles: Mobile Media and Playful Identities" (PhD diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2010), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Jeroen Hopster, "What Are Socially Disruptive Technologies?", *Technology in Society* 67 (November 2021): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2021.101750>.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Sprei, "Disrupting Mobility", *Energy Research & Social Science* 37 (March 2018): 238–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2017.10.029>.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Zavaylova, "To Have and Have Not: Exploring Grammars of Sharing in the Context of Urban Mobility", *Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference Proceedings* 2017, no. 1 (November 2017): 11–33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1559-8918.2017.01136>.

<sup>6</sup> Hofstede, "Country Comparison", *Hofstede Insights* (blog), accessed 8 June 2022, <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>.

<sup>7</sup> Zavaylova, "To Have".

A chapter will be dedicated to addressing each question. In Chapter 1, the concept of individual identity will be introduced as being of an ever-changing nature. This identity crisis is an important aspect of being human and this will be contemplated from the perspective of Social Anthropology and Philosophical Anthropology. Following this, a definition on the distinction between society and culture by Wilhelm Dilthey, will be used to set the stage for the subsequent discussion on the phenomenological theory by Edmund Husserl. The philosopher developed his own framework, the Lifeworld, which encapsulates the subconscious network of cultural relations. Our subjective beliefs find validity in this world of experience as it is pre-given, intersubjective and cultural. There is a possibility to abstract oneself from the beliefs and norms acquired within this intersubjective world and attempt to reach a more transcendental version of the ego. This is explicated by referring to the practice of *epoché*. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the practicality of this approach.

In Chapter 2, the disruptive business model of shared mobility platforms is presented. The first section is dedicated to Dilthey's perception of history and how it is shaped by contingent historical events. This is followed by a typically business framework, PESTLE, which conceptualizes society in terms of six spheres of influence – Political, Economical, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental. This is used to prove that decisions made in one sphere can affect the others: technological innovations can thus have repercussions on the whole social domain. Directly relating to technology and man's need of it for survival is Helmuth Plessner's notion of excentric positionality, which is hence explicated here. The second half of the Chapter is fully dedicated to technology: its etymology and how it can take the form of Socially Disruptive Technologies. Their effect, once introduced, is extensive and can impact human traditions. Shared mobility platforms are an example of it, and they are used as an example to assess the extent to which human belief systems are affected by them.

Finally, in Chapter 3, the case study on shared mobility services in London and São Paulo by Anna Zavaylova is introduced. First, an assessment of her empirical approach in conducting research is carried out. This is followed by a descriptive summary of her findings, with specific emphasis on the dichotomies she identified in terms of the values held by users in the respective cities. The tensions between public and private, teleological and experiential, freedom and ownership are used as examples of value systems. These are in the final section, critically reflected upon by making use of theories by Husserl, Dilthey, Plessner and de Mul; all the while referring to the notion of Socially Disruptive Technologies introduced in Chapter 2.

By following this structure, I am to provide a critical outlook on the intersection between man's cultural identity and socially disruptive phenomena. By making use of theories taken from Phenomenology, as the philosophy of experience and both Cultural and Philosophical Anthropology, I provide a multi-disciplinary reflection on the role of man and technology within society. Considering these considerations, a clear thesis question arises: How to account for the different perceptions of disruptive shared mobility services in London and São Paulo by means of an anthro-phenomenological reflection?

## Chapter 1 – Man’s Cultural Identity

In this chapter, I explore the concept of a dynamic cultural identity. This notion uniquely relates to human nature and is considered by making use of findings from both Social and Philosophical Anthropology. From this, it follows that man is both socially and culturally bounded, as denoted by Wilhelm Dilthey, and I investigate this by further referring to Phenomenology. The notion of Lifeworld, developed by Edmund Husserl, is at last introduced as the main framework of this paper to conceptualize the fact that human experiences are filtered by the intersubjective domain.

### 1.1. Dynamic Human Identity

‘What is a human being?’ and more specifically ‘Who am I?’ is a very common existential question. Throughout our life, we all try to come to terms with our personal identity. The concept of identity itself is multifaceted and hard to point down. It refers to a distinguishing factor of an individual, the unique ensemble of characteristics making up who he is.<sup>8</sup> On paper this definition may appear exhaustive, however we cannot help but wonder: is it even possible to narrow down one identity per person? Or is it just a faint attempt of people to simplify the social disarray of intersecting interests and personalities? With regards to our own identity, most of us have experienced at least once in their lifetime, the same internal conflict Luigi Pirandello describes in his “One, No One and a Hundred Thousand”<sup>9</sup>. We have a vague idea of who we are individually, however once we reflect on identity, we cannot help but sympathize with what the author wrote in his reflection: “The idea that others saw in me one that was not the I whom I knew, one whom they alone could know, as they looked at me from without (...)—this idea gave me no rest.”<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, is the identity I prescribe to myself the same as the one others prescribe to me, and viceversa?

### 1.2. Social Anthropology and Philosophical Anthropology

The fact that I am capable of reflecting on the topic of identity and writing it down in a way that is understandable to potential readers, is only possible by virtue of me being human. ‘But what exactly makes me human?’ is the question that Anthropologists concern themselves with. There are two distinguishable investigation paths that academics can follow: an empirical one and a theoretical one. These translate into the distinction between *Social Anthropology*, as a social science and *Philosophical Anthropology*, as a branch of philosophical investigation.<sup>11</sup> Social Anthropologists aim to develop an empirical account of man and its development throughout history, by making use of observation and experimentation. Philosophical anthropologists are rather concerned with a conceptual analysis of the implicit and explicit aspects of how it is to exist as a human.

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<sup>8</sup> de Lange, "Moving Circles", 15.

<sup>9</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila*, 1st ed., vol. 1, 1 vols (Firenze: Giunti Editore S.p.A., 2007), 188.

<sup>10</sup> Pirandello, “Uno, Nessuno e Centomila”, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Jos de Mul, "Lecture 1 - Quest For Man I" (Plenary lecture, Erasmus University Rotterdam, October 2019).

Both disciplines are uniquely helpful for gaining some understanding on human nature and will therefore be discussed. Social anthropologists study how humans have evolved within society and culture.<sup>12</sup> A paper by Christian Giordano reflects on the notion of *homo creator*.<sup>13</sup> Under this denomination, the human being is observed to be involved in social life. As claimed by the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, man and its identity is intrinsically involved in society and is therefore, subject to social norms. To be specific, social norms entail informal directives that inform how an individual should behave within a society.<sup>14</sup> Despite finding himself inextricably involved in and shaped by public affairs, man is the co-author of social life. He is capable of taking his own decisions, improvise, create opportunities within the social environment. In order to do this, man takes and absorbs past experiences and uses them to alter the present and build his cultural knowledge.<sup>15</sup> He can in a way shape his own identity. This observation coincides with Helmuth Plessner's philosophy: he claims that man produces culture but is in turn also produced by it.<sup>16</sup> It is relevant to mention him as his ideas are further elucidated in Section 2.1.

The question of social norms and society becomes even more complex when one wonders what constitutes a society. Does a community of seven people holding the same interest in baseball count as a society? Or do certain criteria have to be met to define a certain group of people, a society? Society is usually paired with the notion of culture. Wilhem Dilthey, in his "Introduction to the Human Sciences: Attempt at a Foundation of the Study of Society and History" reflects on the definitions of society and culture.<sup>17</sup> The former refers to the external structural organisation of human relations within a community: exemplified by family ties, political parties and the State at large. The latter, also known as *Kultursystem* (Cultural System) refers to the content and normative values commonly shared by a community of people. Culture thus encompasses art, religion, shared norms and scientific beliefs. The two aspects together constitute the structure and internal composition of a society between individuals.

Because of this variety of influences and interconnecting variables, personal identities are fluid. A person is simultaneously bounded by culture, and their own uniquely subjective perception of things. To create social norms that members of a society should adhere to, a common grammar is required.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, man is constantly employing efforts in producing social symbols and exchanging ideas with others. To do so, Social Anthropology presupposes man to be rational. To live and co-exist with others entails developing a sense of collective coherence and understanding why certain things are done in a certain way. All the socially-scientific

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<sup>12</sup> Penny Van Esterik, "Anthropology | Definition, Meaning, Branches, History, & Facts | Britannica", Online Encyclopedia, Britannica, 4 May 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/science/anthropology>.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Giordano, "Homo Creator. The Conception of Man in Social Anthropology", *Finance Bien Commun* 22, no. 2 (2005): 25–31.

<sup>14</sup> Cristina Bicchieri, Ryan Muldoon, and Alessandro Sontuoso, "Social Norms", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/social-norms/>.

<sup>15</sup> Giordano, "Homo Creator".

<sup>16</sup> Jos de Mul, ed., *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects*, vol. 1 (Internationale Helmuth Plessner Kongress, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 17.

<sup>17</sup> Jos De Mul, "Chapter 4 The Historical A Priori of Life", in *Tragedy of Finitude* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 137.

<sup>18</sup> Giordano, "Homo Creator".

notions brought about by anthropologists, can be critically reflected on by resorting to Philosophical Anthropology.<sup>19</sup> As a discipline, it attempts to critically reflect on the essence of being human – overlapping with Phenomenology – and make abstract, rational and reflective assessments of how human relations develop with time. Proponents of it tend to focus on the essence of being a human in the world and attempt to study the structures of consciousness.

### 1.3. Edmund Husserl and the Lifeworld

A notable example of a phenomenologist, whose philosophy will be thoroughly analysed and explicated in this paper, is Edmund Husserl.<sup>20</sup> He was a German philosopher and founder of the school of Phenomenology. That is, he devoted his time and capabilities in understanding first-person experiences of the world. Through consciousness we relate to ourselves and those around us. We are always directed towards an object or a person, yet we cannot fully and easily grasp its essence. In relation to Philosophical Anthropology, Husserl believes that the subject is not merely enclosed in itself but a subject in the world surrounding it.<sup>21</sup> He coins the notion of *Lebenswelt* (Lifeworld), which exists in the field of the subjective as the “universal field of establishable facts”.<sup>22</sup> These facts relate to individual people as part of an intersubjective realm. Husserl often refers to the transcendental ego as a form of self that is necessary and presupposes self-consciousness. He believes that the transcendental ego cannot exist independently of the world. As soon as we start existing, the ‘I’ gets involved with the Lifeworld and the transcendental ego becomes a subject. Our intention is always directed to the world of experience, which is what makes us *subjects* in an a priori intersubjective existence. We, hence, constantly refer to the interconnected Lifeworld to find the source of validity for our beliefs.<sup>23</sup>

Ever since the Scientific Revolution, we have been devoting our rational capacities to making synthetic statements of the world which could serve as base for scientific assumptions and theories.<sup>24</sup> We have developed a formalized conception of experience, prioritizing objective over subjective claims. However, Husserl believes that reducing everything to mere facts is not the natural and right way to make sense of everything occurring outside of our subjective sphere. According to him, science itself is grounded in the Lifeworld since all phenomena cannot be discerned from our shared understanding of the world. From this reflection, he draws three important features of the Lifeworld. First of all, it is pre-given as we can access it before we can access the sciences. It allows us to develop a unique perception of the reality of a world given to us. Secondly, the Lifeworld is intersubjective as our unique perception is shaped by our experiences and those of others around us. Finally, the Lifeworld encompasses cultural attributes: our perception is also reliant on culture and we

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<sup>19</sup> de Mul, "Lecture 1 - Quest For Man I".

<sup>20</sup> Christian Beyer, "Edmund Husserl", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2020 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/husserl/>.

<sup>21</sup> Chung-Chi Yu, "Husserl on Lifeworld and Experiential World", *SocietàMutamentoPolitica*, Sociology and the Life-World, Vol 6 (22 January 2016): 13–26, <https://doi.org/10.13128/SMP-17845>.

<sup>22</sup> Yu, "Husserl on Lifeworld", 14.

<sup>23</sup> Yu, "Husserl on Lifeworld", 18.

<sup>24</sup> Jakub Trnka, "The Crisis of Western Sciences and Husserl's Critique in the Vienna Lecture", *Sophia* 59, no. 2 (June 2020): 187, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-018-0694-1>.

cannot help but grasping concepts with a certain cultural lens.<sup>25</sup> The *Lebenswelt* can therefore be used as a framework to understand why people living in shared societies, share similar thoughts. And these thoughts often translate in similar attitudes and behaviours towards developments in society. In section 3.4., a specific reflection will be carried out to account for different reactions to shared mobility services by people belonging to different cultural spheres of the Lifeworld.

#### **1.4. Discussing the feasibility of practicing Epoché**

Despite maintaining that we cannot prevent becoming subjects in the shared Lifeworld, Husserl still suggests a method that could help getting closer to a transcendental view of worldly experiences.<sup>26</sup> The process by which we can try to do so is called *epoché*. By this notion, the philosopher refers to a form of ‘bracketing’ of phenomena. Fundamentally, it consists in setting aside and overlooking any assumptions and beliefs we may subjectively have. It is a matter of being aware of our first-person point of view and make a phenomenological description of an event without depending on its relation to the world. He claims that philosophers are capable of ‘thematising’ the world, as opposed to just focusing on their personal short-term needs, as most people would.<sup>27</sup> By doing so, they have come up with thorough and refined analyses of everyday concepts. If we were all capable, and devoted our time to doing so, we could become aware of every external influence on us and somehow get closer to our transcendental ego. *Epoché* could be employed to reflect about whether our personal attitudes and behaviours are truly our own or if they derive from our cultural background. It could help us go beyond cultural biases we may have.

Although bracketing represents a concrete technique we could adoperate, it is not the most feasible. If we wish to truly master ‘bracketing’, we, as individuals, should develop an awareness that would enable us to distinguish between the world we experience and the world we interpret. And this seems like a perhaps impossible and incoherent task as it requires more mental and time resources we may individually have. We live our days satisfying our basic needs and going to work or study. We purposely use our time to come up with fast and efficient solutions: both in the workplace and at home. And this leaves us little time to reflect about the origin of our thoughts and decisions.

#### **1.5. Potential Interrelation between the Cultural Subject and Technological Developments**

To further the anthro-phenomenological analysis of the human subject in a cultural world, the theme of technological disruption will be discussed in the following Chapter. The shared traditions acquired by subjects within the intersubjective Lifeworld usually must come to terms with disruptive technological developments. For the purpose of this thesis, the specific impact of shared mobility as a business model on the social landscape will be discussed. This implies the inevitable shaping of general cultural traditions, as well as the impact the introduction of new technology may have on individual identities. By adapting to a new layer of technological

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<sup>25</sup> Dermot Moran, "The Phenomenology of Joint Agency: The Implicit Structures of the Shared Life-World", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 25 November 2021, 25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-021-09788-1>.

<sup>26</sup> Beyer, "Edmund Husserl".

<sup>27</sup> Yu, "Husserl on Lifeworld", 15.

and urban progress, a perhaps new layer of identity will add on to the countless identities Pirandello was so disquieted about.

## Chapter 2 – Socially Disruptive Shared Mobility

In this Chapter, I investigate the disruptive effect of shared mobility platforms. They encapsulate an example of the inextricable relation between man and technological developments. Hence, Dilthey's perception of contingent historical events, along with the PESTLE model of society is used to demonstrate the notable impact of technology on the social sphere. A further philosophic anthropological theory by Helmuth Plessner is introduced to show's man need of tools and technology for survival. The chapter concludes with an explanation of Socially Disruptive Technologies, with particular emphasis on shared mobility platforms, as phenomena which inevitably unsettle human belief systems and traditions.

### 2.1. Contingent Historical Events

The social landscape in which all humans live is defined by an interconnection of spheres. By considering Dilthey's systematic definition of society and culture, as delineated in Chapter 1, one can assess societal developments in terms of contingent historical events.<sup>28</sup> In line with Husserl's conception of the Lifeworld, Dilthey conceives man and his will as bounded by the "spirit of the times".<sup>29</sup> Individuals constrained by the same cultural unity, inevitably develop similar attitudes towards the institutions and social structures they are surrounded by. Only by looking at a specific society, one should recognise the diachronical coherence of its history: we are born in a specific interpersonal environment which cannot be understood without positioning it within a specific historical period. In other words, significant historical events shape specific cultures in an irreversible way and the individuals within them tend to react and adapt in similar ways. As a consequence, their cultural identities are also shaped accordingly. Individuals are born into an already existing society that has and will outlive them. This enables people who are born in the same society to relate and communicate with each other in a way that would not be possible with other cultural contexts.

Significant historical events can occur in various spheres of society. If we for instance, consider the PESTLE framework conceptualized by Francis Aguilar, we can distinguish six abstract spheres of influence within societies.<sup>30</sup> The Political field, the Economic field, the Social field, the Technological field, the Environmental field and the Legal field. Decisions made by, to some degree, influential people in a specific field can have a great impact on the overall system. For this reason, they can be considered *significant* and the fact that they each take place due to specific contextual factors, makes them *historical*. When a new economic policy is implemented or a new law is drawn, all people co-existing in the system will be affected by it. The same reasoning follows for Technology. The relation between technological developments and societal progress is very considerable. Humans would not have survived without their tendency to invent new technological means that facilitate their lives.

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<sup>28</sup> Ilse N. Bulhof, "Structure and Change in Wilhelm Dilthey's Philosophy of History", *History and Theory* 15, no. 1 (February 1976): 25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504874>.

<sup>29</sup> Bulhof, "Structure and Change", 24.

<sup>30</sup> Will Kenton, "PEST Analysis", Investopedia, accessed 8 June 2022, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/pest-analysis.asp>.

## 2.2. Relation between Man and Technology: Helmuth Plessner's Considerations

A very compelling theory regarding man and its relation to technology in nature was expounded by Helmuth Plessner.<sup>31</sup> He was a German philosopher and sociologist who reflected on the ontology of man by focusing on its finitude in space. According to him, individual humans cannot relate to all of nature, but they are capable of experiencing themselves within nature. With the concept “excentric positionality”, Plessner refers to man’s centre of experience being outside of him.<sup>32</sup> He can perceive a clear boundary between his inner and outer world of experiences. Contrarily to animals, men are conscious of this centre that allows them to experience both worlds. In this way, men are capable of looking at themselves from the outside, enabling them to develop empathy and understanding towards fellow human beings. Moreover, they can mediate their life events and simultaneously live in a three-dimensional world. The first being the *outer world*, where they first come in touch with the physical outside reality. The second world is the *inner world*, which they can perceive through introspection and awareness of their own emotions. The third world is the shared world of culture, also known as *Mitwelt*. This is where they get in contact with other subjects and co-exist by sharing cultural values and norms. The manner in which Plessner conceptualizes this third world resonates with Husserl’s and Dilthey’s theories on the relation between individual identity and the cultural sphere in which they exist. All agree that the individual is inextricably connected with the outside cultural world.

Plessner adds that in order for man to survive against the adversities of the natural world, it has to rely on its mental capacities. Man is naturally born without the specific talent other animal species have and thereby, thrives on reason. Thanks to its reliance on consciousness and shared knowledge, man has always been capable of invention. From a philosophical anthropological perspective, man is “artificial by nature”: he requires – the creation of - external tools to exist and properly relate with nature.<sup>33</sup> These tools take the form of technology and culture. They give man the chance to relate to each other in community and develop tangible and intangible strategies to survive.

## 2.3. Relation between Society and Technology: The Role of Socially Disruptive Technologies

Technology is a wide concept which can take the form of enhanced skills or products that we incorporate in our lives to facilitate aspects of it. It is etymologically a combination of the Greek word *technê*, meaning practical skills and craft, and *logos*, meaning expression through discourse.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, technology is a dual concept blending the given physical tool with the interpretation and the use we make of it. Moreover, technology is no longer merely perceived as a means for survival but as means to improve men’s quality of life. It facilitates interconnection between individuals and can positively enhance their daily activities. In fact, its effect permeates in all the other spheres of the PESTLE framework which are undoubtedly shaped by it.

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<sup>31</sup> Jos de Mul, ed., *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects*, vol. 1 (Internationale Helmuth Plessner Kongress, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> de Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> de Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> "Technology", accessed 18 May 2022, <https://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Technology/technology.html>.

And similarly to technology, they are all artificial extensions of human life: created and established by humans to ameliorate human lives.

A practical example exemplifying the common ground between the philosophical stances of Dilthey and Plessner, is represented by Socially Disruptive Technologies (SDT's).<sup>35</sup> They are often a great source of study and concern for business players as they can heavily impact society and the general market. To provide a definition, Jeroen Hopster describes them as technologies that are introduced with new attributes satisfying the need of a niche market but that eventually gain track into the wider market.<sup>36</sup> They can therefore replace or complement already existing products. Further, they may even applications in different industries. In this way SDT's disrupt traditions and reframe what was once considered conventional. Consequences of this are a change in human routines, as well as social and political practices. Essentially, they are historically contingent technological developments that have repercussions on the *Mitwelt* level<sup>37</sup>.

#### **2.4. Shared Mobility Platforms as Socially Disruptive Technologies**

A noteworthy example of Socially Disruptive Technologies are shared mobility platforms. They constitute the interplay between transportation and virtual technologies. In essence, shared mobility as a business model comprises all transportation services that are shared between users.<sup>38</sup> In principle, anyone within a defined service zone can rent one of these vehicles at any time. In this way, the need for ownership is resolved. Various services offer (e-)cars, (e-)bicycles, (e-)mopeds and (e-)scooters. Nowadays, thanks to the progress in information and virtual technologies, these shared transportation services are coupled with smartphone applications. Among other features, these online platforms allow you to reserve and unlock a vehicle through Bluetooth; access the navigation map through GPS and pay automatically through electronic transfer. By connecting these services to an online app, they become easily accessible by anyone owning a smartphone. Technology is therefore facilitating the transition from ownership to sharing of vehicles: it is reshaping the manner in which users relate to transportation and other members of their community.

This ground-breaking progress in technology is also being accompanied by strategic decisions from the political sphere. Municipalities are also favouring these services by reserving parking spaces, road lanes and granting special rights to these shared services.<sup>39</sup> All in all, shared mobility platforms are considered disruptive as they imply lower costs for the user but also lower performance. They are mainly suited and beneficial for people who need to cover shorter distances, often within an urban area. The user only pays the price per use, which might add up to less or more than owning a vehicle depending on the frequency of use. Thereby rendering transportation more democratic. Moreover, an additional advantage of these platforms is

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<sup>35</sup> Hopster, "What Are".

<sup>36</sup> Hopster, "What Are" 3.

<sup>37</sup> de Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Sprei, "Disrupting Mobility", 239.

<sup>39</sup> Sprei, "Disrupting Mobility", 239.

that some of them, commonly referred to as Mobility-as-a-service (MaaS), offer a wide range of vehicles. The user is free to select the most appropriate vehicle depending on the use he is going to make out of it.<sup>40</sup>

Both these seemingly functional attributes, price and flexibility of choice, are the differentiating factors of this new business model which is influencing consumer attitudes. Once a subject starts utilizing these platforms, they inevitably enter a community of users, with whom they share common responsibilities and expectations. This effect can be conceived in terms of “collective intentionality”.<sup>41</sup> Essentially, it refers to the tendency of human minds to be directed towards objects in the world, as well as values and existing worldly conditions. It occurs when at least two individuals hold the same attention, beliefs, attitudes and emotions. A simple example is found in caregivers looking after the same child. Users of shared mobility platforms all share fond feelings towards the same vehicles and may start to feel part of a community and share similar interests. Husserl gives his own account of collective intentionality whereby he endows the ability to assess other people’s experiences to empathy.<sup>42</sup> By practicing empathy, we can all perceive the subjects around us who are also experiencing the same things we are. We can even go as far as understanding what their attitudes and emotions simply by referring to similar past experiences we may have. And precisely this quality allows us to overcome our natural egoistic interests and adapt our attitudes towards others when finding ourselves in shared realities. This reasoning brings us back to the Lifeworld explained in Section 1.3. It appears as if the Lifeworld is the philosophical precondition of shared mobility services.

## **2.5. The potential effect of Shared Mobility Services on Cultural Traditions**

From this discussion on the disruptive aspect of shared mobility as a business model, we can draw a conclusion. Although we, as humans within an intersubjective cultural sphere are the ones producing technologies, we cannot avoid being in turn, shaped by them. Individual subjects are historically placed within a community and develop similar attitudes to the introduction of socially disruptive technologies. Shared mobility platforms as an example of it are significantly impactful as they help to democratize vehicle usage. To some degree, they open the door to a renewed conception of vehicle ownership.

To further substantiate this reflection on the correspondence between a shared intersubjective world and the deployment of shared mobility platforms, Chapter 3 discusses a practical case study. An empirical study conducted by Zavyalova analyses the different reactions of users in London and São Paulo to the introduction of shared mobility platforms.<sup>43</sup> These can be interpreted by means of the reflections carried out in Chapters 1 and 2. Thereby, the anthro-phenomenological reflection of the Lifeworld, along with the discussion on the role of socially disruptive mobility platforms can provide valuable insights in the topic.

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<sup>40</sup> Sprei, "Disrupting Mobility", 240.

<sup>41</sup> David P. Schweikard and Hans Bernhard Schmid, "Collective Intentionality", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2021 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2021), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/collective-intentionality/>.

<sup>42</sup> Sean Stephen Petranovich, "Husserl and Community" (Chicago, Loyola University Chicago, 2017), 114-115.

<sup>43</sup> Zavyalova, "To Have".

## **Chapter 3 – Anthro-phenomenological Reflection**

In this chapter, I introduce a case study by Anna Zavyalova to carry out an anthro-phenomenological reflection on it. She specifically looks at the urban environment in London and São Paulo by conducting an ethnographic research to find out the perception users have of new car sharing ('car pooling') services. She identifies three value-laden dichotomies when it comes to usage: the tension between public and private, between teleological and experiential and between freedom and ownership. After summarizing her findings, these three form the basis of the reflection. This is carried out by referring to the earlier introduced philosophies by Husserl, Dilthey, Plessner and de Mul as well as the previous discussion on SDT's.

### **3.1. The Possible effect of Cultural Systems on Individual Reactions to Shared Mobility**

As determined in earlier Chapters, the human social landscape can be shaped by shared mobility services. Specifically, the relation between man and the need for vehicle ownership. By adopting these services, users enter a community of like-minded people. They all value sharing these vehicles and having the flexibility of using them whenever and wherever they may need. This is just a particular case exemplifying the shared intentionality we all have as humans. This occurs because we all belong to the same shared Lifeworld explaining the convergence of attitudes between different subjects.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, although all humans are born in a shared Lifeworld, we are all individually born at a specific time in history and in a specific place on Earth. This necessarily entails differences in terms of customs and traditions between people born in two different countries. Generally, every group of people has its own unique culture and hence, people born and living in the same city or country are bounded by a specific Cultural System.<sup>45</sup> In this way, it might be expected that people belonging to two different cities, in separate countries, may develop different reactions to SDT's when first introduced. As discussed in section 2.4., shared mobility platforms interact and shape different spheres of society and can have tailored effects depending on the culture they are concerned with.

### **3.2. Introduction to the Case Study on Shared Mobility**

Anna Zavyalova asked herself precisely this question when she conducted her research. In her paper, "To Have and Have Not: Exploring Grammars of Sharing in the Context of Urban Mobility", she seeks to identify the cultural differences in the use of car sharing services.<sup>46</sup> Being a social anthropologist, Zavyalova executed an ethnographic research in three cities: London in the United Kingdom, São Paulo in Brazil and Ahmedabad in India. However, for the intent of this paper, I am only considering her findings on users in London and São Paulo. Over the course of three weeks, she immersed herself in the cultures by traveling, setting up interviews, observing participants and interacting with them. Her goal was to familiarize with the cultural, social, economic, functional and logistical variables that are associated with shared mobility in the three cities. This

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<sup>44</sup> Yu, "Husserl on Lifeworld", 14.

<sup>45</sup> de Mul, "Chapter 4", 137.

<sup>46</sup> Zavyalova, "To Have".

new type of shared mobility is being adopted in several ways and can take the shape of informal and formal pooling.<sup>47</sup> The first refers to all those conventions of sharing rides or carpooling between relatives and friends. They are organized spontaneously without resorting to a mobile application. On the other hand, formal pooling includes all those app-based services that enable any user to ride with a stranger in exchange for payment. In the paper, she mentions UberPool being used in London, and both UberPool and 99POP in São Paulo.

It is important to note that the researcher practices Social Anthropology meaning that, as discussed in section 1.2., she aims to provide an empirical explanation of man and the behaviour he displays across cultures.<sup>48</sup> She specifically emphasizes strategic planning and seeks to find out the practical reasons why people would opt for shared mobility. She follows a very defined structure in her paper: in the introduction she provides an overview of her research efforts and defines all the concepts she will make use of later on. This is followed by three Chapters – one per city – where she dedicates individual sections to each transport option available: public transport, private cars, taxis, informal pooling, and formal pooling. Finally, she concludes with a chapter on the social and cultural components developed by users of pooled vehicles: the first section being on the ‘public-private’ divide; the second on the ‘teleological-experiential’ divide; and the final one being on the ‘freedom-ownership’ dichotomy.<sup>49</sup> All of them are significant social dimensions affected by the introduction of pooled services.

### **3.3. The Social Boundaries affected by the Introduction of Carpooling**

The tension between *public* and *private* mode of transports emerges from the ambiguous nature of formal pooling.<sup>50</sup> Being a recently introduced option both in London and São Paulo, there is still a lack of clear rules when it comes to engagement. In the British city, respondents perceive high uncertainty towards the expected degree of social interaction between concomitant users. Formal pooling is conceived as sitting between taking a bus or a taxi, but not quite one or the other. Being confronted with a new practice, users find themselves unfamiliar with the norms and expectations of others: a common language has yet to be developed. In the Brazilian metropolis, on the other hand, respondents seem to be better adapting to the new formal pooling services. They are more open to exchanging words with strangers in both public and private transport modes. This may be accredited to their shared cultural norms valuing sociability and interaction. Therefore, the confusion felt between the public and private sphere is less pronounced than in London. Paulistanos concern themselves with other attributes, such as cost, comfort and safety. Given the limited option of public services, they are more open to adopting formal pooling as a transportation option. In this way, they are better equipped to develop a shared social language.

The second relevant dichotomy is the one between the *teleological* and *experiential* importance of a car journey.<sup>51</sup> Is one simply interested in the destination, or does he rather value a pleasurable journey to get

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<sup>47</sup> Zavyalova, "To Have", 12.

<sup>48</sup> de Mul, "Lecture 1 - Quest For Man I".

<sup>49</sup> Zavyalova, "To Have", 22-30.

<sup>50</sup> Zavyalova, "To Have", 24-26.

<sup>51</sup> Zavyalova, "To Have", 26-28.

there? Having to share a car with other people stimulates a series of cultural and sensory affections. In London, Zavyalova observed different attitudes among respondents depending on the demographic spheres they belonged to. Younger users enjoy sharing a ride with stranger as it gives them a chance for social exchange and a feeling of rewardedness for choosing a sustainable option. On the other hand, London commuters on their way to work perceive this journey as a time for relaxing and minding their own business. In São Paulo, commuters often have to traverse longer distances to get from A to B. Therefore, they particularly value creating the right social atmosphere with fellow riders. For them, sociability adds value to the journey and satisfies their needs.

The final cultural divide to consider is the trade-off between freedom and ownership. Though history, owning a car was associated with economic success and a greater social status. This is still perceived to some extent in São Paulo. Particularly older users grew up with this notion and can find it almost demeaning to share a vehicle. They are therefore faced with a conflict between traditional values and the desire to embrace new social concepts. They may want to own the journey, as opposed to Londoners who have almost completely abandoned this perception and rather value the experience.<sup>52</sup>

### **3.4. Anthro-phenomenological reflection on findings**

Given these findings, it is interesting to reflect on them by means of philosophical investigation. Hence, I will proceed by discussing each of the three social partitions. With regard to the public-private divide, it resulted that a common language when it comes to socialization is still required in both London and São Paulo. Nevertheless, respondents from the latter city seem to be less concerned about it. When reflecting on this difference in reaction, one may associate it to empirical cultural dimensions. The most recognised cultural framework by academics is the one developed by Hofstede.<sup>53</sup> He ranks a country's culture on the basis of 6 dimensions. The United Kingdom scores an 89 out of 100 in terms of Individualism: this indicates a tendency to prioritize one's self and close family over the rest of society. Brazil, conversely, scores a 38 out of 100: this entails a greater degree of Collectivism or a propensity to take care of each and everyone in own's social surroundings.

These values seem to align with the findings, however these purely empirical findings assume a homogeneity of culture and do not fully account for the intricate nature of culture. As delineated by Dilthey when examining historical contingencies, Jos de Mul also argues that cultures are heterogenous.<sup>54</sup> Being open to the world, they are perpetually evolving and transforming. Hence, the notions of tradition and identity in an intercultural society cannot be fully encapsulated. Most countries as of today, are transitioning towards postmodern societies, whereby we are overcoming grand narratives reminiscent of religious and political ideologies. We are instead, individually able to choose our own customs from a wide pool of options. We are no longer indoctrinated and acquire traditions by custom like we used to in pre-modern societies. To maintain the whole Brazilian cultural heritage as a Brazilian citizen is a choice and more often than not, an exception

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<sup>52</sup> Zavyalova, "To Have", 28-30.

<sup>53</sup> Hofstede, "Country Comparison".

<sup>54</sup> de Mul, "Database Identity", 102.

rather than the norm. In turn, our cultural identities are constantly shifting and evolving as we tend to perceive traditions as commodities: we can simply trade one for another.

In a postmodern world therefore, all individual identities are facing continuous transformation.<sup>55</sup> We are inevitably influenced by the intermingling of cultures as well as the introduction of information technologies. Moreover, relating back to the PESTLE framework, all fields of society will be influenced in some way or another by the introduction of shared mobility services.<sup>56</sup> For instance, the political body in the cities of São Paulo and London may have to implement new legislations and economic policies aiming at encouraging or discouraging their citizens from using these new services. All these contingent factors complexify the scenario even further making it challenging to pinpoint all the factors that make up a 'São Paulo culture' as opposed to a 'London culture'.

The conclusions drawn from the research on the teleological-experiential divide in London indicate similarities in opinions among respondents in similar demographic groups. Younger users particularly appreciate the 'fun' aspect of interacting with strangers and developing new bonds. While older commuters perceive their journey to and from work as a space to think and relax. These attitudes may be explained by the fact that we try to develop our identity by ourselves, but inevitably imitate those around us. Our experiences are bounded by the Lifeworld: in it, individual subjects can locate themselves at the meeting point between a series of experiences they absorb through personal cultural lenses.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, when considering the findings on the dichotomy between freedom and ownership, the first remark is about the car being a symbol of greater social standing. This perfectly exemplifies the trend described by Dilthey when he discusses historical periods in terms of the diachronical coherence of history.<sup>58</sup> One can see how older generations in São Paulo still believe in the sense of success the act of owning a car grants them. They are therefore, still holding on to their past traditions and seem to have a difficult time adapting to the new traditions brought about in the current era. They are perhaps displaying loyalty towards the pre-modern society which governed in their youth: cultural traditions were acquired by custom.<sup>59</sup> Since countries were less intercultural, people had little opportunities to select which traditions they wanted to adopt, as opposed to contemporary post-modern societies. This can be compared with Londoners and their response: they seem to be easily embracing the option of not owning a car. The British city is renowned for its interculturality, meaning that being faced with a wide range of traditions, people can select the ones they want to adopt.<sup>60</sup> An additional reflection which can be made about the dichotomy between the sense of freedom and ownership is in relation to the collective intentionality, as coined by Husserl.<sup>61</sup> Some people simply prefer to own their car or take established means of public transport, as they are more familiar with the social 'rulebook'. They are aware that

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<sup>55</sup> de Mul, "Database Identity", 102.

<sup>56</sup> Kenton, "PEST Analysis".

<sup>57</sup> Yu, "Husserl on Lifeworld", 14.

<sup>58</sup> Bulhof, "Structure and Change", 28.

<sup>59</sup> de Mul, "Database Identity", 102-106.

<sup>60</sup> Caroline Bourne, "Why Is London so Multicultural? — SharedCity", SharedCity, accessed 8 June 2022, <https://www.sharedcity.org/blog/2017/6/12/why-is-london-so-multicultural>.

<sup>61</sup> Petranovich, "Husserl and Community", 165.

once they start using car pooling services, they have to enter a new dimension of lived experience. Entailing a development of a social language with others and a commonality of goals and intentions.

Until now, I have looked at how human traditions and beliefs are put into question by the introduction of shared mobility services, in the form of SDT's.<sup>62</sup> When first encountering this new mobility option, all users, irrespective of their countries, perceive bewilderment. As this case study proves, their perception of what is public or private transportation changes. They are also brought to reflect on whether they want to embrace or reject the opportunity to socialize and interact with strangers; and they start questioning how much value they attribute to concepts like ownership and freedom of movement. It is also interesting however, to look at the other side of the coin and precisely: what is the role that the car plays in the field of pooling. This can be assessed by referring to Plessner's notion of excentric positionality.<sup>63</sup> Man inherently has a boundary that clearly divides its inner and outer self. On top of this, he is also capable of building his own boundaries in the outer world. A car is a tool that was developed for man to move around more efficiently but shortly after, it became an extension of man, an extension of his protective boundary. When you are in your own vehicle, you attribute to it values depending on the function you make of it. Some people may use a car as their safe space to relax and wind back, others may use it purely to bring their kids to school. Some women may even perceive it as their personal shelter when traveling alone at night. All these perceptions vary depending on the social demographic you may belong to – a commuter on his way to work, a family caretaker, or a young woman leaving the house at night. And they may all develop similar attitudes to the car depending on a series of contingent factors and beliefs. These connotations are somewhat evident when talking about personal cars which have been existing for decades: they are nevertheless, still an incognito when assessing shared vehicles. What values will users attribute to them with time? This question is yet to be answered since users still have to grow accustomed to them and their belief systems are still in the process of being overturned. We can still observe a complex interplay of people with dynamic personal identities who are actively looking for a common language with the other users involved. To do this, they will have to rely on their shared intentionality and collaborate towards making these new business models (SDT's) work for all and integrate them in their urban lives.

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<sup>62</sup> Hopster, "What Are", 3.

<sup>63</sup> de Mul, "Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology".

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the topic of man's cultural identity and the intersection it has with socially disruptive phenomena. The critical analysis was conducted by means of multi-disciplinary frameworks, taken from the fields of Social Anthropology, Philosophical Anthropology, Phenomenology, Cultural and Business studies. These were necessary to create an anthro-phenomenological philosophical foundation which could be used to tackle the overarching question of the paper. This concerned the different perceptions of disruptive shared mobility services in London and São Paulo and how to account for them.

From this reflective process, several conclusions can be drawn. First, by uncovering the notion of cultural identity, I inspected its dynamic and ever-changing nature. Man lives and is bounded by, to some extent, the society in which it lives. According to Social Anthropology, we are *homo creator*, meaning that we not only produce social norms and culture, but are produced by them.<sup>64</sup> This was further explicated by referring to the phenomenological tradition: specifically, to Edmund Husserl and his conception of Lifeworld. In essence, the human subject is enclosed in the world he is surrounded by: every intention is directed towards this abstract world of experiences.<sup>65</sup> Since the moment we are born, we are no longer a transcendental ego since all our beliefs and consciousness are formed within this intersubjective Lifeworld. This means that, although we technically have the option of bracketing the world – *epoché* – and gaining a more transcendental picture of it and ourselves, it is a practice that very few people can and are willing to practice. Hence, we cannot deny recognising that all our beliefs and attitudes originate from this Lifeworld. And therefore, our cultural identities are created by reference to it.

Further outtakes arise from Chapter 2, where I addressed the topic of SDT's and shared mobility services. Here, Dilthey's view of contingent historical events when referring to the impact that social developments in can have on traditions and can lead to turmoil.<sup>66</sup> The PESTLE framework conceptualizes precisely this: the interconnection between the political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal fields of society.<sup>67</sup> Technology therefore, being considered as one of the influential spheres, can have notable effects too. Man, is by nature 'artificial', it needs to create technological tools to survive. He does this, according to Plessner, by collaborating with fellow humans. By virtue of our excentric positionality, we all develop an awareness of what surrounds us, providing us with the empathy necessary to create bonds and admit the need for relying on others.<sup>68</sup> Through time, within established societal systems, Socially Disruptive Technologies were created by men, which by definition have wide-ranging and often unexpected repercussions on all spheres of society.<sup>69</sup> Shared mobility platforms are taken as an example for this as they have been causing significant

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<sup>64</sup> Giordano, "Homo Creator".

<sup>65</sup> Yu, "Husserl on Lifeworld", 14.

<sup>66</sup> Bulhof, "Structure and Change", 24.

<sup>67</sup> Kenton, "PEST Analysis".

<sup>68</sup> de Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, 32.

<sup>69</sup> Hopster, "What Are", 3.

changes. First and foremost in the transportation, environmental, legal, and economic field, but even deeper at the level of cultural beliefs and traditions.<sup>70</sup>

Hence, in the final Chapter, a case study was used to verify whether and to what extent traditions were affected. Here, Zavyalova's ethnographic research in the cities of London and São Paulo was chosen as it provides a descriptive rendition of the different reactions of users in each city, to the introduction of formalized car pooling services.<sup>71</sup> Some interesting conclusions regarded the value-laden perceptions of public and private, teleological and experiential, and freedom and ownership. Londoners and Paulistanos are compared to see where they lay on the spectrum of each dichotomy with respect to how they perceive shared mobility services. Some similarities were found among respondents coming from the same city, which could be attributed to cultural norms. Nevertheless, I have considered that it would not be sufficient to only refer to national cultures to explain these reactions. As claimed by de Mul, we are living in a post-modern world, meaning that each individual is free to choose which traditions to adopt.<sup>72</sup> This complexifies the effort of identifying a universal reaction to social developments, across all citizens of the same citizens. Some cultural frameworks, such as the Hofstede dimensions, may attempt to portray a simplified picture of a country's culture by assigning numerical values to the degree of Individualism, Power Distance, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term Orientation and Indulgence<sup>73</sup>. Nevertheless, as this thesis argues, although two individuals belong to the same cultural system and may share some innate norms, it cannot be assumed that they share the same exact cultural beliefs. Cultures are simply heterogeneous and so are cultural identities. They evolve through time and with the introduction of disruptive technologies in the social landscape. Different perceptions and beliefs even arise when considering the disruptive technologies themselves. A car, for instance, has different connotations depending on the person who is using it. Humans build a specific relation with technologies, they perceive cars as their extended outer boundary, as conceptualized by Plessner. All individuals may have different expectations of the vehicle, depending on the use they are going to make of it and the value they attribute to it.

Ultimately, it was found that the real question we should ask ourselves does not concern the comparison of the different reactions of users living in the same 'cultural region'. It should be about assessing the common social language that is created as a reaction to historical contingent events, such as the introduction of shared mobility platforms. And this is developed by considering a series of personal expectations, values, norms that cannot be simplified by referring to a singular cultural system. All humans are part of the same Lifeworld, but everyday experience new things, come in touch with new developments, which constantly shifts their place within that world.

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<sup>70</sup> Sprei, "Disrupting Mobility", 239.

<sup>71</sup> Zavyalova, "To Have".

<sup>72</sup> de Mul, "Database Identity", 102.

<sup>73</sup> Hofstede, "Country Comparison".

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