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## Ride-hailing applications in Vancouver, Canada: Representation, local empowerment and resistance

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### *Abstract*

Technological applications have caused a revolution in the way individual transportation rides are offered and taken in cities all over the world. The adoption and regulation of ride-hailing has been the subject of heated discussion involving elected officials, bureaucrats, industry proponents, the traditional taxicab industry, and civil society. To implement ride-hailing, proponents and platform operators confront an intricate web of decision-making processes and institutional politics. In this way, existing normative processes shape the emergent regulation of such transportation network companies. This article analyzes the case of Vancouver, Canada, one of the largest cities in North America where ride-hailing companies belatedly secured authorization to operate from the provincial government in 2019. Focusing on the policy debate since 2012, the research identifies the interactions and processes of interest representation among various actors regarding this new transportation technology. The analysis shows how a variety of political, economic and regulatory strategies contributed to the delayed adoption.

Keywords: : ride-hailing services, interest representation, Uber, taxi industry, resistance

### *Résumé*

Les applications technologiques ont révolutionné la manière dont les trajets de transports individuels sont proposés et empruntés dans les villes du monde entier. L'adoption et la réglementation du covoiturage a fait l'objet de discussions animées impliquant des élus, des bureaucrates, des promoteurs de l'industrie, l'industrie traditionnelle des taxis et la société civile. Pour mettre en œuvre le covoiturage, les promoteurs et les opérateurs de plateformes sont confrontés à un réseau complexe de processus décisionnels et de politiques institutionnelles. Cela faisant, les processus normatifs existants façonnent la réglementation émergente de ces sociétés de réseau de transport. Cet article analyse le cas de Vancouver, au Canada, l'une des plus grandes villes d'Amérique du Nord où les entreprises de covoiturage ont tardivement obtenu l'autorisation d'opérer du gouvernement provincial en 2019. En se concentrant sur le débat politique depuis 2012, la recherche identifie les interactions et les processus de représentation des intérêts entre les différents acteurs concernant cette nouvelle technologie de transport. L'analyse montre comment diverses stratégies politiques, économiques et réglementaires ont contribué au retard de l'adoption.

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Mots-clés: services de covoiturage, représentation des intérêts, Uber, industrie du taxi, résistance

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## Introduction

Ride-hailing services were finally approved for business operation in the Province of British Columbia in 2019, after a seven-year period of intense public debate, resistance and delay. This paper investigates the interactions and interest representation of different actors around the introduction of ride-hailing in the Province's primary metropolitan area, greater Vancouver. Specifically, we seek to understand why and how various interest groups were able to delay the introduction of ride-hailing and shape the form of the regulations eventually promulgated. The study contributes by highlighting the significance of the social relations that conditioned the political economy of resistance to, and eventual acceptance of, ride-hailing in Vancouver. By highlighting the nature of the social relations between the actors involved in urban transportation planning and decision-making processes, we show that urban transportation debates entail a broader performance of local culture and politics that includes, but extends beyond, established governmental institutions.

This is a qualitative study of the meanings and rationales embedded in narratives deployed by the various actors, the nature of the social relations between them, and the social and political institutions that shaped the resulting regulatory framework. We present evidence of the agency power of the representatives of the taxi industry in sustaining an unusually long process of *non-decision policy* around the regulation of ride-hailing at the provincial level (Kingdon 2011, 54). The behavior of the representatives of this industry reflect the specific ethnic and social attachments of some Indo-Canadian voters at an urban scale (see Tables 2 and 3, below), and is also indicated through campaign financial contributions to political parties at local, provincial and federal levels.

There is also empirical evidence of social relationship-building and systemic cooperation between private and public agents, at local and provincial levels, in order to establish a regulatory schema to protect and maintain the private sector taxicab business. This was sought, not through market success, but rather by the efforts of interest groups and their material and symbolical access to government power (Holyoke 2015, 128; Zywicki 2015, 78).

Moreover, it was possible to identify wider connections between local and communal beliefs and cultural identity, and the resistance to technologic applications. These elements were evident in participant's statements about the use and preservation of place, sustainability and local identity. These emplaced political, economic and cultural sentiments, which extend beyond the actors directly involved in the specific dispute, also affect urban transportation decision-making.

To understand this political and moral economy we report here on the perspectives and policy positions of the Provincial Government and Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation, and regulatory agencies such as the Passenger Transportation Board (PTB) and Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC). The perspectives of city councils in the Metro Vancouver area, representatives from the transit authority, business, trade, real estate and technology start-up sectors, and the traditional taxi industry are also analyzed.

In order to investigate these narratives, we interviewed actors who were publicly associated with the debate. We also consulted institutional and governmental planning and policy documents, statistical data on voting, population and transportation in the province and in Metro Vancouver area, and as well as local and national news articles, all as a way to understand the speech of actors that we could not reach to interview directly.

This paper starts with a brief description of Vancouver's taxi industry, followed by a review of literature on interest group action, and a discussion of the ride-hailing scene in British Columbia. Thereafter we identify the main voices in the debate and the findings of our investigation. We conclude with a discussion of the prospects for expressions of local social preferences in similar urban policy processes.

## The case of Vancouver: Taxi transportation, ride-hailing and resistance

Long before 2019, Vancouver had its first ride-hailing experience: shortly after having started operations in Toronto in March of 2012, Uber arrived in Vancouver. An official reaction was immediate: a local limousine-company owner opened a claim at the PTB which then officially notified Uber that the company was offering a limousine service

without following the provincial rules governing the service. The limousine company was joined by the taxi sector and the Vancouver Taxi Association filed an injunction against the company. All ridesharing companies were later banned by the provincial government through several transportation regulations. From then, until September 2019, Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia experienced a loud and long period of debate about the possibility of regulating ridesharing and ride-hailing applications in the local transportation system.

As in other parts of Canada, the British Columbia government is responsible for infrastructure within the province (Tindal & Tindal, Stewart & Smith 2017, 21). A whole set of provincial government institutions is responsible for regulating transportation, including the PTB which is an independent tribunal that makes decisions on applications relating to the licensing of passenger directed vehicles such as taxis, limousines, shuttles and vans. Established by law in 2004, PTB is charged with developing and implementing transportation network services (TNSs) such as *Uber*.

Another is the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC), a public corporation that was created in 1973 after a long campaign by the social-democratic BC New Democratic Party (NDP), based on other provincial NDP government's experiences (McCandless 2013). However, in BC, the principle that auto insurance is a public good that should be provided on a break-even or non-profit basis was changed after the 2001 election. The newly elected centre-right BC Liberal government encouraged the transfer of an extraordinary level of surplus capital to the provincial coffers. That said, we did not find evidence that control of motor vehicle insurance by the Province was a key determinant of the delay in ride-hailing adoption in BC; rather, provincially regulated and provided motor vehicle insurance was a means to that end.

The Greater Vancouver area has one of the few transit networks in North America regulated and operated by a single public local authority, the South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority, commonly known as *TransLink*. TransLink is responsible for the maintenance and expansion of the transportation network, controlling bus, ferry and light train systems, as well as dealing with the issues related to car ownership and planning, and generally aiming to promote viable alternatives to the single passenger motor vehicle (Wales 2008, 23).

In parallel to the public transit system, greater Vancouver also has three car-sharing companies (*Evo*, *Modo* and *Zip Car*) with around 3,000 shared vehicles. Two of these three companies, *Modo* and *Evo* originate in, and operate exclusively within British Columbia. Described as the *car-sharing capital of North America* (Britten 2018) the City of Vancouver has the most shared vehicles per capita in the region. However, many regional municipalities outside the City of Vancouver do not have these services; and until 2019, they also did not have ride-hailing services such as *Uber* or *Lyft*.

Finally, one of the most relevant players in the transportation system in the region is the taxi industry, controlled by 33 different taxicab companies with a total of 2,340 taxis; 4 companies operate only in the city of Vancouver area with 687 vehicles, the remainder operate in other municipalities (City of Vancouver 2015). Greater Vancouver is organized via an originating-area boundaries mechanism for regional trade that prohibits taxis licensed in neighbouring municipalities picking up riders in Vancouver, for example. The drivers usually own licenses that are issued by the PTB, but they also are under municipal supervision with respect to their operating areas and fares. Vancouver has a rate of 0.64 taxis for every 1,000 people, whereas in other major Canadian cities the rate is 1.08, and the 10 km fare is 15% higher in Vancouver than the average of a sample group of Canadian cities (CUTA 2018, 54). There have been many public complaints regarding the efficiency and quality of the service (Duran 2019).

The taxicab industry in Vancouver (and in British Columbia) is predominantly controlled by license owners with south Asian backgrounds. This is similar to other large cities in North America, where almost all taxicabs are owned and operated by immigrant drivers (Leisy 2019, 10). As the third-largest ethnic group in Metro Vancouver, Indo-Canadians comprise around 12% of the population. A majority live in the City of Surrey, with large presence also in the municipalities of Vancouver, Surrey, Delta and Burnaby (Statistics Canada 2017).

Taxi owners and drivers in British Columbia are represented by the *British Columbia Taxi Association* which represents roughly 75% of the taxi industry in the whole province. A second group, the *Vancouver Taxi Association*, representing the sector in the city of Vancouver, split from the former in 2012. Both represent the associates' interests at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, and one of their main concerns is the threat represented by ride-hailing companies.

Besides the taxi industry, there is also active participation by multiple social and civil organizations around ride-hailing, including representatives of business and local trade, housing and real estate sectors. Organized groups pro-ridesharing and *ride-hailing* advocate their position openly in the local and provincial media, together with

political parties. One of these groups is the *Ridesharing Now for BC* coalition. Sponsored by Lyft and Uber, this group claims to represent different sectors, including health care, real estate, education and entertainment.

### Taxi industry and ride-sharing technology

The sharing economy, described as a wave of new type of businesses that use the Internet to match customers with service providers (Slee 2015, 11), was initially represented by an American group of 75 organizations called *Peers*, with activity concentrated in three kinds of service industries: hospitality, transportation, and education. In the transport industry, the leading sharing economy fundraiser was Lyft, which had raised \$530 million USD in 2015. At first, Uber was not part of the sharing economy, but just a platform to get a ‘classy ride’ (Slee 2015, 57), giving a sense of status for customers by offering a limousine service. Uber’s expansion has been driven by unprecedented investment by venture capitalists, seeking to lock in market dominance over competing firms such as Lyft.

The successful campaign for ride-sharing was initiated in Seattle, and supported by Lyft and Uber, provided a template for a lobbying strategy that has since been replicated elsewhere. Uber’s founder, Travis Kalanick, who reportedly employs 161 lobbyists in the US alone, has declared that any laws and regulations that are unfavourable to Uber are “anachronisms in need of overhauling” (Business Insider 2017). In 2013, *Peers* convinced the State of California to recognize a new category of transit organization called Transportation Network Companies (TNCs). According to Schneider (2017, 82-93), TNCs sell a service that allows pre-arranged transportation in a privately-owned vehicle for financial compensation. Before long, most other jurisdictions in the United States and around the world had adopted the classification, creating a new category of service alongside the traditional transit system.

As a technology disruptive of traditional transportation services, ride-hailing applications are commonly associated with undermining existing regulations applied to these services, and they tend to seek to avoid the costs of car insurance, sales tax, mechanical vehicle inspections, and the provision of universally accessible services (Slee 2015, 59). There is also evidence that the net effect of ride-hailing contributes to increased traffic congestion through displacement of transit use and active-transport (walking, cycling) trips, and through increased car ownership (Clewlow and Mishra 2017; Ward et al. 2020). Due to this, the revolution caused by Uber and others has elicited protests and resistance in cities worldwide, and especially from taxi companies and drivers, in some cases leading to strikes, lawsuits and violence.

Meanwhile, according to the ride-hailing supporters, over the years the taxicab industry had become cartelized and protected by market entrance barriers as a consequence of the regulation promoted by public and governmental bodies. This opened up a space for the discourse of the need for competition in the industry, despite the increasingly precarious employment of drivers in both traditional taxi and ride-hailing segments (Hall and Krueger 2018; Esbenshade and Shifrin 2019; Standing, Standing and Biermann 2019). For ride-hailing proponents, the taxi industry embodied a lack of investment and innovation which affected both service quality and the working conditions of drivers (Dempsey 1996; Bessant et al. 2006; Blasi and Leavitt 2006; Bruno 2008).

Given the vulnerability of the taxi industry to such critique, the sharing movement headed by Uber and Lyft found a window of opportunity to blame regulatory barriers and governmental interference as the main causes of stagnation in the industry. In reaction, taxi industries and drivers, license owners and others directly or indirectly affected by the consequences of these new technologies initiated a counter-movement against the ridesharing companies, working in the defense of their interests mainly through regulatory arenas (Schneider 2017, 88).

Turning to Vancouver, it is important at the outset to note that municipal governments in British Columbia, and indeed across Canada, enjoy substantially less autonomy than do local governments in most of the United States; cities in Canada are said to be “creatures of the Province”. After the British Columbia government blocked Uber’s operation in 2012, the regulation of passenger services was identified as key point in the debate about ridesharing.

For example, there was a loud dispute about what license would be required to drive a ridesharing vehicle, since a commercial license (*Class 4*) is currently required by taxi or limo drivers in the Province (in British Columbia, a *Class 5* license permits driving for private/personal reasons). Both the PTB and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation indicated that all ridesharing drivers must obtain a Class 4 commercial license, which requires a special road test, medical exam, and vehicle inspection (CBC News 2019a).

The Provincial Cabinet also initially recommended delaying those services until 2023, and instead sought to boost the number of taxis in the region. These decisions were stimulated by the coalition of taxi drivers, which hired a professional lobbyist to advocate around their concern about the significant reduction in taxi-license values and

related uncertainty caused by TNCs (Saltman 2018). Still, at the end of 2018, the Provincial Government released Bill 55, the *Passenger Transportation Amendment Act*, which detailed the rules governing ridesharing and ride-hailing companies.

The ride-hailing companies were very critical of the Class 4 license requirement, arguing that this rule may be such a restrictive requirement that it could prevent the ridesharing model from operating in the province (Fletcher 2019b). Uber's spokesperson for western Canadian operations also stated his concern that caps on numbers of vehicles and controls on pricing could present a major roadblock to the company's expansion into British Columbia.

Uber's spokesperson said no other jurisdiction in Canada sets controls on pricing or vehicle supply (DeRosa 2018), and the same feeling was shared by the spokesperson for *Ridesharing Now for BC*, which declared the organization's members were "bewildered" that the future of ride-hailing remained uncertain (The Star 2018; Kirkwood 2019). Ultimately however, when the provincial government issued the final rules about ride-hailing operations, it maintained the Class 4 license criteria (Fletcher 2019b).

In seeking to understand both the delayed introduction of ride-hailing, as well as the form of the regulations eventually promulgated, we explore the decision-making around ride-hailing in greater Vancouver through an analysis of the representation by interested actors, both in urban (municipal, community) and provincial spaces. Vancouver can be regarded as an intriguing case of interest representation and participation in decision-making on urban transportation, helping us to understand the behavior of groups in public agenda-setting and in the definition of alternatives.

## Representation and social change

Investigating the level and pattern of representations and interactions related to the eventual decision to allow ride-hailing in Vancouver provides a way to understand the challenges attendant to the formation of public policies in the urban context. Representation is an open and infinite political process (Rosanvallon 2006, 76), an activity that moves continuously in time and space and involves different actors and arenas (Urbinati and Warren 2008, 34).

Understandings in the literature of the phenomenon of the interest representation are evolving. Previously representation was linked to pluralist and institutionalist contexts, where it was related to debates about the nature of representative government and to a logic that identified a series of discrete spheres of representation by and towards the State. Contemporary understandings of representation concentrate more on the transformations of representation itself, in which State and society are placed side by side in the deliberation of public policy. This evolution in the understanding of representation makes space for non-electoral forms of representation, including communal forms of participation (Urbinati 2010) and, we would add, to those rooted in urban civil society. Representation is now understood as a process and a construction (Lavalle, Houtzager and Castello 2006, Urbinati and Warren 2008, Urbinati 2010). Scholars highlight the diversity of representative roles played by social actors, and the growing significance of informal influence (Urbinati and Warren 2008, Saward 2011).

The possibility of changing society and public policies through representational action is an important idea in contemporary understandings of how policy is made in the public sphere. Social actors can act in direct ways, such as by contacting policy makers, and in indirect ways, such as through protests, public campaigns and statements; and typically, social actors perform their influence in much more informal than formal ways (Thomas and Klimovich 2014, 170). The multiple sources of information, communication and influence that citizens activate through the media, social movements and political parties are not merely accessory, but are instead recognized to be constitutive of political representation (Urbinati 2010).

Often, groups are formed and organized in response to change, or threats of change, to defend their members' interests, and in order to maintain established social, political or economic relations (Kingdon 1996; Thomas and Klimovich 2014). Strategies applied in the regulatory arena that are intended to favour or avoid specific policies that affect specific groups, can be interpreted as part of the process by which multiple social interests maintain a contradictory coexistence (Kingdon 1996, 84). Hence, distrust of society (or, social action by others) plays a democratic and resistant role in relation to the constituted powers, according to Rosanvallon (2006, 92).

In general terms then, civil society actors are able to maintain a negative power of influence through the democratic process of interest representation, as opposed to the positive power of voting and making institutional decisions. Negative power entails the ability of investigate and censor, controlling or changing a given course of action, without detracting from the ideas of elected government and the crucial role that political parties play in unifying

and formalizing sets of social interests (Urbinati 2010, 213). On the other hand, it remains important to consider the possibility that a private interest may capture governmental institutions to promote their interests at the expense of the 'public interest' (Olson 1982, 73). Although actions by interest groups may be legal, they may lead to clientelism, patronage and corporatism.

Recognizing that the demands of particular actors, and the weight of the representation of their interests in urban policy-making — dynamics of democracy that are not limited to the decision-making processes within state institutions — are interpretative keys that can explain situations such as the long delayed decision-making around the adoption of TNS in Vancouver. We present the main dimensions of this representational process below, starting with some comments on our methodology.

## Methodology

Based on an exploratory analysis of the actors who were directly or indirectly related to the regulation of ride-hailing in Vancouver, we identified those actors who were more active and central to the public debate. Accordingly, we sought participants and representatives involved in transit and transportation matters in British Columbia and in the Metro Vancouver area. We gathered data using in-depth interviews in the months of June and July 2019. The seven interviews each lasted an hour on average, and all participants were men aged 40 to 60 years.

We developed a semi-structured interview script with topics organized in two blocks. The first block contained questions about the participant's evaluation of the transit and transportation situation in their city, and their positioning with regards to ridesharing and ride-hailing services in BC. In this paper, we focus on the second block of open-ended questions, in which participants were invited to elaborate on their personal or group perspective about *the likely reasons for the long time taken to arrive at a decision regarding the authorization and regulation of ride-hailing companies, and the strategies and/or official actions taken by themselves and others in order to promote or to discourage ride-hailing in Vancouver and in BC.*

Those who participated in the interviews had different institutional locations: a staff member of the provincial Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation; a director of the regional transit authority, TransLink; a manager in the City of Surrey; an elected councilor in the City of Vancouver; a representative of the car-sharing sector; a representative of the taxi industry; and a representative of the real estate industry.

We tried to contact representatives of *Ridesharing Now for BC* and ride-hailing companies such as Uber and Lyft but we failed to reach them after several attempts. We would have preferred these proponents to have participated, and we acknowledge this as a limitation to our study. Hence our core findings focus more on the mobilization and interest representation of opponents to ride-hailing. At the same time, the reluctance of powerful actors to participate in research is not a good reason to leave such matters unstudied, and we have been able to draw on the (voluminous) use of public media by proponents to understand their perspectives.

Data from interviews were supplemented by secondary data sourced from publicly available reports, official regulatory publications on the matter in BC, over 60 news articles from Vancouver, BC and other cities in Canada. We also present selected results of the 2013 and 2017 Provincial elections, as summarized in Table 2, to demonstrate the electoral importance of swing ridings in the greater Vancouver region's suburban City of Surrey.

## Bases of resistance

Regarding to the first block of questions, the majority of the participants did not agree that the positive impacts of ride-hailing adoption were enough outweigh the negative ones. For the representatives of the taxi industry and car-sharing movement in BC, the two most vocal opponents of ride-hailing, this technology would impact the region through a capital leakage from the local economy to the headquarters of TNC's, as well as to provoke externalities such as pollution and traffic congestion.

Although potential beneficial effects from ride-hailing services were noted in some interviews, especially by the respondent from the real estate sector (such as the discouragement of car ownership and of trips in single occupancy vehicles, and a potential boost to the local economy in the entertainment and tourism sectors), the majority of declarations were against ride-hailing. According to most respondents, there is an understanding that the entry of a new and disruptive model of transportation will undermine the sense of control by members of the community and their institutions.

A large part of the rationale of the resistance to ride-hailing's entry was expressed as an aversion to its potential impacts on city traffic, and relatedly, to competition to the current public transport management model. The respondents highlighted the role played by TransLink as rather satisfying, and they showed concern about the harmful effects on ridership in the mass transportation system. We can identify this perspective in the statement of one of the interviewees, who appealed to his belonging to a technical field to express his opposition:

“Because the public in general is not aware of some of the negative aspects in the other markets. In the transportation world, transportation planners and engineers are aware of it, but most members of the public would not know there has been issues in other cities”. [City of Surrey employee]

The oppositional positioning of the participants is better understood through the information offered in the second interview block, which concerned the actors' perceptions of the lengthy decision-making about ride-hailing in BC. It was possible to identify that the respondents' declarations in the dispute focused around four main aspects; the ride-hailing regulation model, the pressure power of the taxi industry, the defense and protection of public transportation, and what we characterize as an ideology of local and regional preservation and belonging.

A high degree of conflict was identified around the definition of the service regulation regime, especially considering that the model already applied to the taxi industry, which is historically highly regulated in BC, especially in relation to third party insurance coverage. According to the taxi industry representative:

“the taxi insurance in Vancouver or Metro Vancouver is 25,000 dollars a year. There are companies who are paying close to 30,000 dollars in the newer cars. They want to make sure that there is enough coverage. And talking about Uber, they do not have nothing.” [Participant 1]

This aspect was also supported by other actors, and the participant from TransLink pointed out that a “level playing field” should be adopted, especially with regards to the type of license required (Class 4 commercial license) which is already mandatory to drive a taxi in BC. The declaration of the taxi representative was incisive: “why should the rules be any different for Uber driver versus taxi drivers? They are doing the same thing”. This aspect controlled a huge part of the ride-hailing decisional agenda in the Province, showing a significant level of conflict between those who currently controlled the taxi service and those aiming to introduce ride-hailing operations.

Participants also revealed a desire to promote an institutional maturation process around decisions about ride-hailing, demonstrating a kind of distrust in an alleged ideology of innovation around these services. For example, the car-sharing company respondent and the city councilor highlighted the unusual conditions under which the regulatory instances (Ministry, PTB, ICBC) have to work when establishing a new set of rules for ride-hailing; this innovation also requires institutional empowerment in order to process the inputs and take decisions:

“there is very little to reference and compare so, the Province is effectively starting with the blank page and saying what we do, what work, and that takes time as well”. [City of Vancouver councilor]

The pressure exerted by the taxi industry on local politics was also mentioned frequently. Five of seven participants identified a high level of political pressure of the taxi industry as a reason for the slow decision-making process, where the participants stated that this sector acts in a market protection mode. They also pointed to the taxi industry's lobbying of provincial and local government. From the Provincial government Cabinet, this understanding of the puzzle was related to the viability of the taxi industry:

“Ride-hailing companies offer transportation services similar to those offered by taxis. The taxi industry in Vancouver is comprised of local businesses that provide local jobs with protections and benefits. If the taxi industry is to remain viable, regulation of taxi and ride-hailing services must either be harmonized to the extent that both services can compete for the same customer base, or sufficiently distinguished so that consumers are choosing between two different kinds of service. It is important that the Province establish a regulatory framework that creates equal opportunity and sustains economic livelihood for the local vehicle for hire companies”. [Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (2019, 2-4)]

Analyzing the performance of the taxi industry in the representation of their interests, we find that demands for strengthening the sector were met by a political response, indicating that the pressure was real. In 2018, the NDP Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, Ms. Claire Trevena, approved a bill to boost of the number of taxis “to make it easier for people get a ride in the region” and to “make sure that the taxi industry to be able to compete on a level playing field when new players are introduced” (Saltman 2018).

Another element of this intricate relationship between the community of taxi owners and the provincial government was the provision in 2018 of \$1 million of public funding to a group headed by an Indo-Canadian businessman from Surrey to develop a ride-hailing app to compete with Uber and Lyft (Peng 2019). This was described by the local press as “nothing more than an attempt to hijack the ride-sharing business with a little help from their government friends while British Columbians wait for a real solution” (Link Newspaper 2018).

Other factors that contributed to the long delay in the decision-making process around ride-hailing were identified; in the participants’ speech, as well as in the local and provincial media reporting, elements of a collective identity and public interest can be identified as aspects of a local culture that boosted defensive or preservationist responses to the perceived threat represented by the ride-hailing technologies. For instance, Vancouver’s positioning as the first car-sharing city in North America, as well as, the efficiency of TransLink operations, were quoted as desirable features of the local urban transport system. Respondents argued that these technical elements afforded a local capacity to resist the unregulated entry of ride-hailing services.

We name this dynamic that underpins some of the local and provincial resistance to ride-hailing a *Made in B.C.* ideology. According to the participants, solutions developed in the Province represent a communal effort to advance economic and entrepreneurial alternatives that take social, cultural and environmental peculiarities into consideration.

In this way, the basis of the resistance to ride-hailing can also be related to more ideological and symbolic roots, and not exclusively linked to the protection of the economic outcomes. Participants signaled that their resistance against Uber and other transportation network services represented some level of commitment to local values and cultural identity.

### **Taxi industry representation and political dynamics: ride-hailing as point of debate**

The influence of interest representation upon policymakers is relatively difficult to measure quantitatively. In contrast, the behavior of voters, shaped by campaign messages, contributions and political funding, can offer us insights on relative effectiveness of action by organized interests. Additionally, campaign financing and political contribution to parties are ways of building relationships with key government representatives, regardless of their political or ideological orientation. These financial contributions also are about ‘making friends’ and are not necessarily directly about changing specific policies or demanding appeals (Holyoke 2016, 257).

Much of the representation of groups around ride-hailing in BC was performed in successive, hotly contested, provincial elections. It is possible to identify the weight of ethnic composition of the greater Vancouver taxi industry through the community of Indo-Canadians in BC. Many in the community of voters economically implicated in the taxi industry are located in the suburban municipality of Surrey which has become a space for the maintenance and development of Indo-Canadian identities, distinct from other Vancouver ethnic identities (Walton-Roberts 1998, 315).

The Indo-Canadian community in BC, extremely intertwined in taxi sector, accounts for 15% of the population in the six largest municipalities in greater Vancouver (see Table 1). The population is a significant group in institutional politics representation, having a strong participation in both local and provincial election.

Surrey has the highest proportion of Indo-Canadian voters, which can affect the political behavior, according to two participant’s declarations:

“they are very politically impactful. If a candidate or a political party has the support of the Indo-Canadian community, they tend to vote in large waves; they vote as a block and they vote in very strategic lines, that could leave a political party in government in a bad position.” [Participant 4]

“I think the taxi industry has a pretty strong lobby presence. If you look at the political geography, five provincial ridings in Surrey, and the taxi industry in Vancouver is largely Indo-Canadian. Indo-Canadian people are very concentrated in Surrey, and they have a pretty powerful voting block”. [Participant 7]



**Table 1**

Six biggest municipalities in Metro Vancouver area, number of constituencies and South Asian population in 2016

Source: Census 2016 (Statistics Canada 2017)

Municipality	Population	Electoral Districts (2017)	South Asian Population	% South Asian
Vancouver	631,486	11	37,130	6.0 %
Surrey	517,887	9	168,040	32.4%
Burnaby	232,755	4	18,735	8.1%
Richmond	198,309	4	14,360	7.3%
Coquitlam	139,284	3	6,220	4.5%
Delta	103,604	2	20,485	20.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,719,721</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>258,750</b>	<b>15%</b>

After Uber left the province in 2012, ride-hailing became an element of mobilization for the Indo-Canadians, and at some extent, there was pressure coming from this community in the provincial elections in 2013, evident when the leader BC Liberals adopted a non-decision position around ride-hailing services. This allowed the party which had been in power since 2001 to gather support in that election in Surrey, contributing to a surprising election win. This support is visible in the first four columns of Table 2. According to one participant, in 2013, the BC Liberals:

“fearing that it is going to be a big clash in the Southern Asian and Indo-Canadian community and some target ridings in Surrey and South Vancouver, they put the Uber services out of business pointed it toward to after the next election”. [Participant 4]

The result of the 2017 provincial elections (see the four rightmost columns in Table 2), obviously, was not only due to pressure from the taxi industry led by the Indo-Canadian community; however, it is observed that there was a deeper connection between taxi driver’s representation and the commitment of political parties in the defense of the interests of the taxi industry, especially in light of the subsequent power-sharing alliance between the BC NDP

**Table 2**

Results of 2013 and 2017 provincial election by ridings in six Metro Vancouver municipalities

Source: Legislative Library of British Columbia 2014

MUNICIPALITY	TOTAL NUMBER OF RIDINGS	2013		2017		NDP GAIN (LOSS) RELATIVE TO LIBERALS (2013 TO 2017)
		NUMBER OF RIDINGS WON (PER PARTY)	TOTAL VOTES IN THE MUNICIPALITY (PER PARTY)	NUMBER OF RIDINGS WON (PER PARTY)	TOTAL VOTES IN THE MUNICIPALITY (PER PARTY)	
Vancouver	11	NDP (7)	82,636	11	NDP (8)	1
		Liberals (4)	46,176		Liberals (3)	
Surrey	8	Liberals (5)	65,378	9	NDP (6)	3
		NDP (3)	29,579		Liberals (3)	
Burnaby	4	NDP (3)	26,394	4	NDP (4)	1
		Liberals (1)	10,543			
Richmond	3	Liberals (3)	33,114	4	Liberals (4)	(1)
Coquitlam	3	Liberals (2)	19,441	3	NDP (2)	1
		NDP (1)	9,675		Liberals (1)	
Delta	2	IND (1)	11,376	2	NDP (1)	1
		Liberals (1)	9,613		Liberals (1)	

and BC Green Party. Following the 2017 elections, the two parties entered into an agreement that secured majority support for the BC NDP.

Note that the net gain of three ridings for the NDP in Surrey (see last column of Table 2) was substantial given that the party ended the election winning fewer ridings province-wide than the BC Liberals. In other words, Surrey was crucial to their success in securing power despite the electoral math. In their governing accord, the NDP and Greens excluded ride-hailing and ridesharing from the shared decisional agenda.

The votes of the Indo-Canadian community and their taxi industry were also cited as one of the rationales for the official political opposition to ridesharing by the BC NDP. For the same poll, the BC Liberals declared that they would introduce legislation to enable ridesharing companies to operate by December of the same year (BC Liberals, 2017, Chapter 3). Meanwhile, in the BC NDP Platform, the party openly criticized the BC Liberal for being pro-ridesharing (BC NDP 2017, 48). The political platforms for the three parties in the 2017 provincial election are shown below in Table 3.

**Table 3**

Ride-sharing and ride-hailing in the political platforms for the 2017 Provincial Election

Source: Business Council of British Columbia 2017

<b>BC Liberal Party</b>	<b>BC New Democratic Party</b>	<b>BC Green Party</b>
<i>“Introduce legislation to enable ridesharing companies to operate in B.C.” “legislate a tax credit for people who use car sharing services”</i>	<i>“harness the benefits of ridesharing services to build on the existing taxi system”</i>	<i>“Examine tools such as mobility pricing to manage congestion in urban areas”</i>

No party won a majority of seats in the election, but the rightmost column of Table 3 shows that there was a clear swing of votes towards the BC NDP, especially in Surrey and other municipalities known to contain a significant of Indo-Canadian community. According to one local observer, “one other factor could have also persuaded some voters of south Asian ancestry to reject the BC Liberals it was their promise to introduce ride-sharing services like Uber by December, which would hurt the taxi industry” (Smith 2017).

The financing of provincial electoral campaigns is also relevant although it is not determinative because the opponents of ride-hailing donated to politicians across the spectrum. Nevertheless, taxi companies were an important source of campaign financing to the main parties the province. From the year 2005 to 2012, the NDP received some \$160,700 from BC Taxi Association, while the Vancouver Taxi Association donated \$91,800 to the BC Liberal Party between 2012 and 2017. The same is replicated in the local stage, where the Vancouver Taxi Association donated in 2014 \$32,500 to the Non-Partisan Association (NPA), a centre-right municipal party with connections with the provincial Liberals; and donated \$78,500 between 2014–2017 to Vision, a municipal party linked to the Provincial NDP; as well as \$5,000 in 2014 to the local Greens. Between 2014 and 2017, the taxi sector donated roughly \$154,000 dollars to municipal political parties in Surrey, including to the mayor elected in 2018.

In this sense, the outcome after the provincial election in 2017 represents the strong adoption of the interests and the agenda of the taxi industry in the decision-making process. After the NDP formed provincial government in 2017 (with the backing of the Greens), it took two more years before they eventually permitted (regulated) ride-hailing services in the Province.

## Discussion

This paper has investigated the social interactions and interest representation of different actors around ride-hailing in Vancouver, considering the public debate in the period over seven years until its eventual approval by the provincial government in 2019. Vancouver has shown itself as one of the most resistant cities to ride-hailing services due to the regulatory processes imposed on the leading companies such as Uber, through local, cultural and ideological dynamics, as well as by the voting and lobbying power of the traditional taxi industry in institutional politics.

Likewise, the participation of actors linked to the local public sphere was relevant in that they contributed to the appropriation and reframing of the debate around urban mobility and transportation. This made possible the creation of a space of resistance based in elements of self-preservation and protection of particular social and symbolic local

values, observed in the actors' declarations. Those actors from public and state institutions were also able to identify with the elements of this shared social and collective belonging, indicating an understanding of social responsibility in the decision-making process. This is one of the key elements of the resistance to ride-hailing companies, namely, the perspective that collective needs should come ahead of the disruptive, external and entrepreneurial ones.

Through this study we were able to identify that the transportation network companies are understood as an interference in local social relations, capable of undermining the community's ability to determine its own future, insofar as they represent and are controlled by global capital. In that sense, the defense and representation of the interests performed in the regulatory arenas in the province, and consequently, the regulatory regime applied to Uber and Lyft, brings not only the possibility for protection of existing commercial relations, but can also represent the safeguarding of the collective sociability and local cultural identity.

The length of the decision-making process, the delay in organizing and filtering the inputs into the decisional agenda, and the subsequent regulations for ride-hailing services allowed the local and provincial community, as well as other relevant actors, to establish a deeper relationships and understanding about transit and transportation issues. Delay brought with it more time for reflection on previous experiences of the externalities from these services, grounding the resultant regulatory regime in local and societal interests — or at least attempting to. In this particular case, the delay was essential to promote greater public participation in decision-making, and the inclusion of additional considerations in the decisional agenda around ride-hailing.

One side of this resistance shows the relevance of the significant positioning against the symbolic power of the ridesharing ideology that Uber and other companies represent. The ridesharing movement erects its technology as a *panacea* for all collective and social problems, reinforcing a neoliberal agenda by denouncing the weakness of government institutions, attacking representative politics and governmental bureaucracy as responsible for the perceived failure of the promises of collective progress. In doing so, agents of disruptive technologies assert an individualistic perspective and a neoliberal rejection of communal solutions (Dardot and Laval 2013).

Instead, this dispute highlights the ability of individuals and communities to develop a shared and *reflexive calculation of the impacts* and likely outcomes associated with the entry of technology companies. Most of our respondents revealed a clear concern about the potential for ride-hailing to destabilize existing social and economic dynamics in the city, ranging from competition with the public transit system to community sustainability and collective livability.

This lead actors to defend core aspects of their collective life against the externalities of individual action (pollution, traffic, damage to the environment) and to build a counter-movement that drew upon social and collective power through the mobilization of an ideology of local solutions (i.e., *Made in B.C.*). This moved the policy debate in the direction of the safeguarding collective social values, such as, the infrastructure of the municipal transit authority and car-sharing alternatives developed in the region. Such dynamic can be called *spontaneous* resistance, a communal movement of self-preservation and empowerment against alien forces and interests.

However, a more efficient resistance model was apparent when social forces and interest groups worked together within political and governmental institutions that enjoy legitimated power. Such institutional power is represented by the close cooperative and dependent relationships among political actors, political parties and a community of voters tied to the taxi industry. These civic actors worked directly with policymakers and the Ministry. The *institutional* side of the resistance was performed via an influence function and through the vote, visible in the campaign contributions and influence of the Indo-Canadian electoral community.

The case of Vancouver suggests that this dynamic is still persistent and effective nowadays, especially in disruptive moments of capitalism which can potentially destabilize social relations and urban-economic dynamics (Polanyi 2001). In this way, practices that combine regulation, political action and political rent extraction are present and effective in institutional and governmental arenas even in highly developed societies (Zywicki 2015). In the case of ride-hailing in Vancouver, interests based in particular urban communities achieved influence in provincial decision-making processes.

In summary then, non-electoral forms of representation and collective participation by the various actors in the public sphere is shown to be capable of reconstructing and reframing the patterns of decision making on urban dynamics, in ways that amplify the possibilities of societal influence over public policies.

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