



New trends in e-commerce deliveries:

The Rise of Instant Delivery Services in European Cities

Research Brief 5.3a

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What are ‘Instant Deliveries’?

Courier services within cities have always existed (orders to troops defending the city, and more recently pizza at night and urgent documents from office to office). What makes them special today is that e-commerce is a fully established activity and customer demands are becoming more sophisticated. This often means a fast delivery at a low price or for free. The technology, including smartphone apps and tools for crowd sourcing, enables the provision of another type of delivery service. The improved match-making between supply and demand facilitates the use of spare transport capacity and new sets of providers also on short distances with little time available.

Considering this new context, we propose the following definition: “**Instant delivery services** provide on-demand delivery within two hours – by either private individuals, independent contractors, or employees – by connecting consignors, couriers and consignees via a digital platform.” In this definition, we emphasize the limited timeframe between an order and a home delivery (or a delivery on a workplace or any other place), as well as the use of distributed data accessed with a standardized and widespread technology. Currently, this means using a smartphone app. We use the term “instant” in a similar way as McKinnon (2015), emphasizing the increasing need for “instant gratification” of the urban consumer. Within instant delivery services, business to consumer (B2C) deliveries are dominant but not exclusive, as will be seen further on.

Method and Main Results

Method

Our paper relies on an extensive data collection. Primary sources were made from a survey (face to face interviews) with 96 instant delivery workers in Paris (Saidi, 2017). Details on the sample of interviewees are provided below. The questionnaire contained 32 items covering three categories of questions: the worker's personal situation (age, training, place of living); the facts of the job (which company, how many hours, what revenue); and the worker's perception of the job's benefits and challenges. We carried out four additional interviews with instant delivery company managers in France and Sweden. Secondary sources were business journals (in the transport, freight and supply chain areas) and the economic or generalist press, as well as company websites. Specifically, we made an analysis of a selection of 40 digital platforms whose websites and blogs were scanned extensively (including terms of service).

Main outcomes of the research

The work provides an **overview of the main issues** concerning instant deliveries, supported by data (including a survey of 96 courier delivery providers) and examples. After presenting a typology of companies (digital platforms) involved in instant deliveries, we question in what way they transform the urban freight current patterns.

We highlight **four issues**, discussing their potential to impact urban freight services and related policies in European cities: 1) Freight trips and data; 2) Business models; 3) Labor legislation and work conditions; and 4) Local public policies. We conclude by saying that predicting the medium-term consequences of these changes is difficult, but it is essential that city planning and policies take account of these developments and consider how planning and possibly regulation need to be adapted to these new ways of doing things.