

1. Opinions



The lockdown is revealing the limits of our lifestyles, pace of life and environments

13 mai 2020

Mobile Lives Forum

While contemporary lifestyles are structured around the ability to travel often, quickly and far, the lockdown has introduced an unprecedented constraint that has temporarily interrupted the usual spatial and temporal deployment of our activities. While digital tools are serving an important role in making these measures bearable, they can't compensate for this limitation of travel on their own. All dimensions of our lives have been disrupted: home life, social life, consumption, work, family life, leisure activities, holidays, etc. Indeed, the lockdown is revealing our dependence on mobility.

While contemporary lifestyles ¹ are structured around the ability to travel often, quickly and far, the lockdown has introduced an unprecedented constraint that has temporarily interrupted the usual spatial and temporal deployment of our activities. While digital tools are serving an important role in making these measures bearable, they can't compensate for this limitation of travel on their own. All dimensions of our lives have been disrupted: home life, social life, consumption, work, family life, leisure activities, holidays, etc. Indeed, the lockdown is revealing our dependence on mobility.

For better or worse, our entire program of activities must adapt to this enforced lack of travel: from isolation to overcrowding, from a welcomed slowdown to unsustainable acceleration... the consequences are many and inequalities are exacerbated. This is a shared experience because it is showing us how our usual lifestyles depend on parameters that aren't always chosen and that we seemingly don't control: work rhythms, land planning, job location, housing prices, production and distribution of consumer goods... What influence can we exert on these conditions? The lockdown has imposed a new relationship to time, space and activities that is revealing how our lifestyles, pace of life and environments are totally dependent on fast and carbon-based mobility. These findings can help us think - on an individual and then a collective scale - about the lifestyles and environments we want for the future, in the context of the environmental emergency. The study and description of our experiences, to which this analysis wishes to contribute, ² is therefore a vital step in allowing us to define our aspirations and participate in the political debates of the post-lockdown world.

The importance of people's living environment: space and proximity, a new balance?

By limiting all travel, the lockdown has created an almost total dependence on our local environment: the features of one's home, the presence or not of nature, shops, the people in the neighborhood... Mobility is usually an adjustment variable: people can live in a fairly secluded area because they have a car to go shopping and see friends, they can stand to live in a small apartment in a big city because they enjoy going out and spending time in other spaces (cultural places, parks...) or going on weekends in the countryside. Access to transport is a decisive criterion nowadays and a major draw when choosing a place to live (access to public transport, TGV line, connection to highways...). Conversely, not being able to move makes people prisoners in their own homes, and some homes that are livable when people are able to spend time outside can in this case become unbearable. Typical examples of this are cases of overcrowding in suburban social housing ³ or students confined alone in studios. On the other hand, the lockdown has shown that homes with gardens (two thirds of the population ⁴), which are regularly bemoaned for requiring more car trips, provide pleasanter living conditions. The effects of having a restricted perimeter of movement (1 kilometer) and limited timeframe to go out (1 hour) are, unsurprisingly, much less harshly felt in rural and suburban areas than in denser spaces. ⁵ At a time when health and climate issues require us to reduce motorized travel in the years to come, should we not rethink these living environments in a sustainable way?

The experience of the lockdown is revealing the perverse effects of metropolization. ⁶ If a certain degree of density allows people to more readily maintain and develop positive social connections in this time of crisis (solidarity, conviviality, neighborhood relations), we may wonder if the growing desire for an "urban exodus" by people living in dense city centers isn't the indicator - if one were needed - of the limits of extreme density in terms of resilience and livability? For instance, 23% of French people would have liked to have spent lockdown in a different location, and this feeling is much stronger among Parisians (39%). The real estate industry is now seeing a renewed interest in single-family homes in the countryside or in small and medium-sized cities. ⁷ These desires reflect a trade-off between the need for space and the need for local resources, which informs us what an "ideal" living environment would be. Everyone can imagine what a resilient lifestyle would look like for them and their loved ones in order to cope with the next crises: for example, living close to families and especially elderly parents, developing neighborhood ties and pooling resources, and for some even being able to produce part of their own food. These aspirations are far from being heard, let alone pursued, by elected officials, land planners and real estate developers.

Is virtual mobility helping people to avoid travel?

For social relations, leisure and entertainment, as well as for those who can work or study remotely, digital tools have taken center stage in people's daily lives under lockdown. Discussions about the value and limitations of these tools (telework, distance learning, telemedicine, etc.) were already very present in the public debate before the lockdown, but today they are resonating strongly in people's daily lives. Temporarily at least, "virtual mobility" has become a substitute for physical mobility, and as such appears to be a central condition for the feasibility and acceptability of the lockdown measures. While some of the methods used - the novelty of which lies more in their intensity than in their very nature ⁸ - foreshadow new habits, others already seem destined to disappear or to return to their normal use. We are now seeing with greater sharpness the distinctions made - whether collective or individual - between what is desirable or not, in order to avoid physical movements via digital tools.

People's experience of telework is mixed (53% of teleworkers say they enjoy this experience) ⁹, but its use will undoubtedly be expanded after confinement, for sanitary reasons but also because this experience has accelerated organizational changes: ¹⁰ 33% of French people have now experienced

teleworking compared to only 7% before the lockdown.¹¹ However, other practices currently being deployed will suffer a different fate even: if online family reunions were already common for those whose relatives are far away, under normal conditions people generally travel to take part in social activities.¹² For many, going to see family and friends is the first trip they plan to make as soon it's possible to do so.

Today, most "connected" households are witnessing a complete blurring of boundaries between different spheres of life: personal, family, school and professional. While this confusion is sometimes innocuous, such as when a child wanders into frame during a work videoconference, it can also become more troubling when for instance a boss or superior calls during dinner with the family. We are clearly seeing how important it is to have distinct places and spaces to perform our different activities and to keep our various "spheres" separate. During the lockdown, virtual mobility has also become a way to compensate for a lack of intimate space or the sense of confinement, through films, TV shows or video games. All digital practices have seen an exponential increase: 56% of respondents report spending more time watching television, movies and TV shows, and 39% report spending more time on social media.¹³ However, the capacity of technological systems, the lack of ecological sustainability and the exclusion of "unconnected" people - who are already the most isolated (older people, those with low education, etc.)¹⁴ - represent structural limits of the "digital life."

The need for trust, social contact and sensuous experiences makes it very difficult to substitute physical mobility: as soon as possible, work groups that managed to maintain themselves online will want to meet up again, hyperconnected teenagers¹⁵ will go and meet their friends and music fans will go to concerts. People's attachment to physical movement remains strong, as long as it is wanted. This distinction, in action, between desired mobility and digitally substituted mobility can ultimately be a lever to consider for avoiding the most polluting trips.

A massive disruption of our pace of life and temporalities: what lessons should we take away?

This new spatial constraint and its organizational consequences have disrupted our pace of life and our relationship to time: everyone is living through a novel and intimate experience that is revealing the desired and unwanted aspects of their normal pace of life. In the present context, more so than in normal times, we can more readily list the things we feel we are missing (mainly leisure and social life, for 40% of French people) and those we don't miss so much (time spent traveling, which is the case for 39% of us). A significant proportion of French people report appreciating the slower pace of life enforced by the lockdown (44%) and a majority enjoy being able to devote more time to themselves and to their relatives with whom they are confined (68%).¹⁶

However, others are experiencing it very differently: for workers who are still required to travel or for those who are teleworking while managing a household, a new, more intense organization is needed. Those who can no longer perform their professional activity at all face an infinite amount of free time ahead of them, with the threat of boredom always looming. For some, their activity schedules have become lighter (fewer activities, fewer meetings with friends, less travel...) while for others they have intensified, because they have to integrate household tasks that were previously delegated (meals, childcare, education, housekeeping, etc.). The contemporary injunction to use one's time "well," promoted by social networks, can sometimes cause distress: even under lockdown, being voluntarily idle is still frowned upon.

Time organization is similarly subject to new tensions. In families, conflicts are exacerbated over the time devoted to household chores - largely performed by women¹⁷ - or the time spent in front of screens by children and adolescents. For some people, their circadian rhythm is also under stress, due to anxiety or lack of physical activity. Workaholics and those whose activity has increased (caregivers, delivery men, telecommunication workers, etc.) are seeing their working hours explode and encroach

on their free time and sleep. On top of this, leisure time no longer offers as many opportunities to relax or have fun after work as before. Finally, since March 16, our medium – and long-term outlook has changed – what will happen in a month, this summer, at the start of the new year? It's hard to predict, and yet more than ever we must project ourselves collectively into the future.

What pace of life and environments do we want? What place do we want to give travel in our lives after the lockdown?

Living through the lockdown has required us to gain some perspective on our “usual” lifestyles and has revealed certain aspirations more clearly: the desire to relocate, to change jobs, to spend more time on manual activities... Beyond individual life choices, these aspirations reflect a need for slower paced lives and more resilient living environments, which contrasts with the current trends of metropolization and acceleration. These aspirations converge with the need to reduce the volume of rapid and carbon-based travel in order to achieve environmental goals: 53% of French people are already in favor of introducing rationing measures to limit polluting travel (planes, cars, motorbikes...), but only if such rules are fair and don't allow the well-off to get around them.¹⁸ Analyzing our experience of the lockdown can therefore help us think about the solutions needed to cope with future crises as well as those that are already here.

Notes

- 1 Lifestyle refers to a set of personal aspirations and abilities that are shaped both by a person's characteristics (related to past experience, resources, learning) and the levers offered by the environment. It consists of all the experiences and activities through which a person strives to live a life worth living (Sen, 1999).
- 2 The observations presented here are based on the results of the survey led by the Mobile Lives Forum among of a representative sample of 1,500 people on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's mobility and lifestyles (April 2020).
- 3 According to INSEE, 5 million people are in lockdown in overcrowded housing (8.2% of the population excluding Mayotte), a situation that mainly affects large cities, which account for 74% of overcrowding cases (40% of which are in the Paris metropolitan area).
- 4 Nearly two-thirds of the population lives primarily in a house, 95% of which have a garden. But more than a third live in apartments, where access to the outside is more limited: in 2013, only 6.2% of main residences in collective buildings had access to private spaces such as a garden, outdoor space or courtyard (INSEE, 2020).
- 5 Survey on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's mobility and lifestyles, Mobile Lives Forum, April 2020.
- 6 Géopolitique du Covid-19, Boris Grésillon, AOC.
- 7 Le Monde, The lockdown reinforces the city-dwellers' desire for the countryside and boosts the housing market, April 27, 2020.
- 8 Christian Licoppe, Video-communications, videoconferencing and the lockdown, May 2020
- 9 Survey on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's mobility and lifestyles, Mobile Lives Forum, April 2020.
- 10 Fondation Jean Jaurès, Les actifs et le télétravail à l'heure du confinement, March 2020.

11 Survey on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's mobility and lifestyles, Mobile Lives Forum, April 2020.

12 According to the 2020 National Survey on Mobility and Lifestyles, the average travel range for social activities is 34 km, compared to 14 km for studies and employment and 20 km for vital activities.

13 Survey on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's mobility and lifestyles, Mobile Lives Forum, April 2020.

14 In France, in 2019, 12.0% of people lacked Internet access at home, regardless of device (computer, tablet or mobile phone). This proportion of people without Internet access was higher for older people (53% of those aged 75 or over) and those with low education (34% of those without degree or with a primary education certificate) (INSEE, 2019).

15 "Narrative Game - In 2061, what do young people prefer: physical mobility or virtual mobility?", Mobile Lives Forum, March 2020.

16 Survey on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's mobility and lifestyles, Mobile Lives Forum, April 2020.

17 According to the 2010 INSEE survey on people's schedules, women spend 3 hours and 50 minutes a day on "household time" when men spend only 2 hours and 20 hours, and this gap seems to have widened during the lockdown.

18 Survey on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's mobility and lifestyles, Mobile Lives Forum, April 2020.

Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

En savoir plus x

Lockdown

The lockdown measures implemented throughout 2020 in the context of the Covid-19 crisis, while varying from one country to the next, implied a major restriction on people's freedom of movement for a given period. Presented as a solution to the spread of the virus, the lockdown impacted local, interregional and international travel. By transforming the spatial and temporal dimensions of people's lifestyles, the lockdown accelerated a whole series of pre-existing trends, such as the rise of teleworking and teleshopping and the increase in walking and cycling, while also interrupting of long-distance mobility. The ambivalent experiences of the lockdown pave the way for a possible transformation of lifestyles in the future.

En savoir plus x

Movement

Movement is the crossing of space by people, objects, capital, ideas and other information. It is either oriented, and therefore occurs between an origin and one or more destinations, or it is more akin to the idea of simply wandering, with no real origin or destination.

En savoir plus x

Lifestyle

A lifestyle is a composition of daily activities and experiences that give sense and meaning to the life of a person or a group in time and space.

En savoir plus x

Teleworking

The remote performance of a salaried activity outside of the company's premises, at home or in a third place during normal working hours and requiring access to telecommunication tools.

En savoir plus x

Associated Thematics :

Lifestyles

- Aspirations
- Living environments
- Futures
- Housing
- Digital technologies
- Proximity
- Rhythms of everyday life
- Crises

Other publications



How the health crisis disrupted daily mobilities: testimonies from the inhabitants of Bogotá and Lima

Jérémy Robert, Vincent Gouëset , Florent Demoraes, Jimena Ñiquén, Hernando Sáenz, Omar Pereyra, Daniela Rodríguez



Slowing down: Yes, but why, what and how?

Jean-Yves Boulin



Travelling less to travel better!

Mobile Lives Forum



Mobility trajectories: a key notion for conceptualizing and shaping changes in the way people travel

Laurent Cailly, Marie Huyghe, Nicolas Oppenchaim

- 1 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/lifestyle-1756>
- 2 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2020/04/23/survey-impacts-lockdown-french-peoples-mobility-and-lifestyles-13297>
- 3 <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4478728?sommaire=4476925>
- 4 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2020/04/23/survey-impacts-lockdown-french-peoples-mobility-and-lifestyles-13297>
- 5 <https://aoc.media/analyse/2020/05/06/geopolitique-du-covid-19/>
- 6 <https://bit.ly/2Wy7QV3>
- 7 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/2020/05/13/video-communications-videoconferencing-and-lockdown-13298>
- 8 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2020/04/23/survey-impacts-lockdown-french-peoples-mobility-and-lifestyles-13297>
- 9 https://jean-jaures.org/sites/default/files/redac/commun/productions/2020/0804/rapport_ifop-fjj_2020.04.01.pdf
- 10 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2020/04/23/survey-impacts-lockdown-french-peoples-mobility-and-lifestyles-13297>
- 11 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2020/04/23/survey-impacts-lockdown-french-peoples-mobility-and-lifestyles-13297>
- 12 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2019/01/10/narrative-game-2061-what-do-young-people-prefer-physical-mobility-or-virtual-mobility-2552>
- 13 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2020/04/23/survey-impacts-lockdown-french-peoples-mobility-and-lifestyles-13297>
- 14 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2020/04/23/survey-impacts-lockdown-french-peoples-mobility-and-lifestyles-13297>