

1. Opinions



Travelling less to travel better!

30 october 2020

Mobile Lives Forum

Before the Covid crisis, the more we travelled, the better: mobility was not only supposed to enable daily activities, but also to facilitate access to employment and even success in life. The lockdown undermined this unbridled mobility and now, we're at a tipping point: after experiencing forced immobility, will we go back to the highly mobile lifestyles we had before the crisis? Can we still say that we have to "move to succeed"?

Knowing how to travel is useful, but travelling isn't necessarily useful

Clearly, knowing how to locate yourself in space (especially in unknown territories), how to use public transport or even how to drive are skills that make life easier and make you more independent and confident. Sociologists such as Vincent Kaufmann at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne have shown that having various mobility experiences (traveling, moving homes, etc.) enables people to acquire such skills, to adapt easily to an unfamiliar environment and especially to manage increasingly intense work-related journeys.

Obviously, having a driver's license gives you the autonomy to organize your daily life: going shopping, not relying on another family member to get around, accompanying children or dependent parents, going to work, etc. However, can we still say that knowing how to travel helps you find a job? Unfortunately, we just don't know. The success of policies aimed at facilitating mobility to find jobs is not being monitored by government or researchers: instead, it is the act of passing the driving test itself, rather than the effect this permit has on its recipient's subsequent job search that is being studied. Indeed, it is assumed that this effect must necessarily be positive. However, this assumption perversely helps to normalize the view that an entire region or even the whole country are one large pool of jobs into which everyone can dip without worrying about distances. This encourages significant daily mobility between home and work, and even compels people to unwillingly uproot and move to a different location. As a result, over time, the French (and their employers) have internalized and accepted the injunction that they must "travel to succeed."

This is a problem in more ways than one.

Mobility is tiring

Firstly, because those who travel the most for work suffer the consequences: fatigue, stress, weakening of social and family ties. These effects are well documented by researchers such as Stephanie Vincent at the LAET lab (Laboratoire d'Aménagement et d'Economie des Transports) and Emmanuel Ravalet at the University of Lausanne ¹. Secondly, because leading a "mobile life" isn't necessarily in line with French people's aspirations: even though we travel more and more (10 hours per week on average in France including 4 hours just for work) ², eight in ten people want to slow down, almost one in two people want to live and work in greater proximity, at the scale of their neighborhood ³, and the rest don't want to travel more than thirty minutes.

Travelling less to reduce CO2 emissions

Beyond corresponding more faithfully to the aspirations of a majority of French people, a policy change would have the significant benefit of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which conventional transport policies fail to achieve

Notes

4 responsible for 30% of national emissions, transport is the largest CO2 emitter in France and is still not under control. Given the climate emergency, it would be common-sense to stop encouraging unbridled mobility, and in particular work-related trips which account for 45% of weekly distances travelled by French people. Especially since we know that the more we travel for work, the more we travel in other areas of life as well (social activities, sport and leisure, etc.). ⁵

Adapting territories to our lifestyles, not the other way around

Finally, in today's society, knowing how to travel is important, but having the opportunity to travel well - that is to have chosen and pleasant mobility practices that rely more on low-polluting modes of transport - is better. The goal is to give French people the means to be mobile all the while limiting their CO2 emissions (use of public transport, active modes or carpooling), but also to be more immobile when they desire it (more local lifestyles, working close to home, teleworking, etc.). If the lockdown allowed French people to experiment with alternative rhythms of life^[6] and to change their relationship to travel, travelling well is clearly only possible if we realize that it's the territories that must adapt to our desired and sustainable lifestyles and not the other way around. Public policies must stop making mobility and car use the main variable to accommodate other activities - especially work - in a territory that is deemed unchangeable.

At a time when Covid has made us rethink the localization of strategic jobs, this is an unexpected opportunity to reconsider land use planning and the relationship between employment pools and labor pools, to facilitate access to services close to home and to secure active and shared modes. We can start by commuting less to work, whether by increasing the use of telework or the possibility of exchanging jobs as proposed by JobiLX, and by reviewing the goals of mobility assistance policies so that they better match people's aspirations.

1 Research Job Mob, Forum Vies Mobiles, 2014.

2 National survey on mobility and lifestyles, Obsoco, 2020.

3 Aspirations for mobility and lifestyles, Forum Vies Mobiles, Obsoco, 2016.

4 Reducing the carbon footprint of mobility: what are the right policies for France?, Forum Vies Mobiles, 2020

5 National survey on mobility and lifestyles, Obsoco, 2020.

6 Survey on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's mobility and lifestyles, Forum Vies Mobiles, Obsoco, 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

Teleworking

The remote performance of a professional activity away from the company by means of telecommunication tools, at home or in a telecentre.

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

Associated Thematics :

Lifestyles

- Change in practices
- Futures
- Proximity
- Rhythms of everyday life
- Work

Policies

- Time policies

- Ecological transition
 - Public transport
 - Cycling & Walking
 - Cities & Territories
-

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



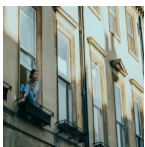
Mobility

Agathe Lefoulon, Mobile Lives Forum



One foot in the city, one foot in the village: the invisible mobility of urban workers in India

Matias Echanove, Rahul Srivastava



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

Mobile Lives Forum

1 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2014/02/14/jobmob-2174>

2 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2019/01/07/national-survey-mobility-and-lifestyles-12797>

3 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2016/05/23/aspirations-mobility-and-lifestyles-3246>

4 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2018/05/17/decarbonizing-mobility-what-policies-france-12424>

5 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2019/01/07/national-survey-mobility-and-lifestyles-12797>

6 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/project/2020/04/23/survey-impacts-lockdown-french-peoples-mobility-and-lifestyles-13297>