

<div class="logo logo-mobile"> Contact :
Christophe Gay </p>

The current destabilization of the dominance of automobility and fossil fuels has opened the possibility of envisioning “post-car futures” (Dennis and Urry 2009) and “mobility transitions” (Nikolaeva et al. 2019). Cycling advocates and policy-makers have embraced the promotion of “active transport” (cycling, walking) plus greater use of mass transit and new forms of micro-mobility, as the solution to pushing forward this sustainable mobility transition. Yet it remains unclear how great an impact the expansion of cycling practices and infrastructure can make when automobile dependence is still so extensive and locked into most built environments. Moreover, there are also concerns about the role of low-carbon policies in making affordable low-carbon transportation less accessible for low-income communities.

Aim

The return of pro-bike policies in cities in Europe, the United States and other countries, including cities in the global south, owes much to the lobbying of pro-bike movements. In the context of these controversies on the role of bicycles in the mobility transition, the objective of this research is to perform a comparative analysis of biking mobilizations in France and the USA and to question their role in the social, political, and environmental transformation of the spaces in which they emerge.

This dissertation will explore how political activism emerges out of cycling movements and the role that these mobilizations play in shaping larger societal transitions. This question is one that interests theorists of mobility justice (Sheller,

2018), and historians of urban mobility (Emanuel et al., 2020). There are many ways to approach it. This research will focus on the role of activists who participate within the Bikespace under different hats: these include expert-citizens — who are both practitioners, planners and activists; community leaders and organizers who also work performing community outreach programs for government agencies and planning firms; activists who have acquired roles of political leadership; and “activist-scholars” who have played a central role in mediating and translating the discourses, frames, and representations of cycling movements across different contexts, thereby actively participating in amplifying the representation, the circulation, the impact, and the efficacy of such mobilizations. The project will seek to better understand the impact of such intersectional activists on local policy networks, as well as in building wider ecological transition movements.

In the last few years, bike movements have been active in promoting policies that favour cycling and the political objectives that they favour in France and the Americas. Activist-scholars have been involved both on the ground — leading and organizing — and by accompanying these movements from academia. These experiences of everyday mobilities turning into political mobilization have been described in the academic literature in both France and the United States (Lugo, 2018; Rigal 2020), and as pertains to various marginalized cyclists such as women (Abord de Chatillon, 2020) but also racial minorities (Barajas, 2016; Lugo, 2018).

These studies lead to 3 core questions :

- How do the motivations, values, and the embodied practices of cycling — that happen within the “Bikespace” of the bike movements — shape their political objectives and the actions they pursue in order to satisfy them?
- What role do bike movements play in translating local cycling movements into sustainable mobility transitions, and then in amplifying such transitions across the urban, national, and transnational scales?
- And how do they do so in contexts of intersectional politics that can be inclusive of many groups who have traditionally been excluded from urban planning and transport planning?

Methodology

This research will analyze and compare the political transformation brought about by bike movements operating within different urban and national contexts, as they seek to amplify their impact across scales. I propose to choose the terrains for this doctoral proposal according to the territorial anchors of the networks of bicycle activism and research to which I belong, and the gatherings, meetings and congresses where the advocates meet. By belonging to these networks of both LHC and The Untokening, I have access to a broad network of activists based all over France, the US, and the Americas. Yet my participation is also rooted in those places where I have been actively engaged with the cycling communities as an activist, as a researcher, or both: Geneva, Paris, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Bogotá.

The approach will combine different kinds of methods, adapted to different scales:

- 1) at the embodied scale the aim of my research is to use participant observation to study how intersectional identities (e.g., race, gender, class, and migration status) shape the practices of biking, the political views, and the objectives of participants;
- 2) at a meso-scale the aim of my research is to analyze organizational structures and specific events organized by cycling activists to better understand how these actors — informed by their identities and life experiences – participate, lobby and formulate policies to influence the production of “Bikespace”, thereby shaping practices of local and regional governance;
- 3) at a macro level my research aims to study how these actors participate in building national and ultimately transnational networks of bike activism that inform the policies adopted in their respective countries.

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Chapô

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