

## 1. Projects



# The analysis of cycling protest movements in North America: Mexico City, San Francisco and Vancouver

Ongoing research

Begin: April 2022

End: January 2023

This project aims to analyze cycling protest movements in three North American cities: Mexico City, San Francisco and Vancouver. The aim here is to study and analyze these movements and their underlying demands through the notion of mobility justice.

Research participants

- Matthieu Gillot
- Patrick Rérat

## The research project

The research will be conducted by Matthieu Gillot during a bicycle trip up the North American continent, from Mexico City to Vancouver via San Francisco. He will study the collective cycling protest movements in these different cities by examining their participants' profiles, their discourses, their means of action and the influence of their protests on populations and public institutions.

Matthieu Gillot's hypothesis is that these movements are underpinned by demands of a various nature: cycling (need for infrastructure, legitimacy, etc.), political (social and political protest, place in decision-making processes), environmental (fight against pollution and greenhouse gas emissions) and feminist (cycling as a means of emancipation and empowerment). As such, they can be analyzed through the notion of mobility justice, proposed by Mimi Sheller. According to her, we should be thinking collectively, from the standpoint of mobility, about different contemporary crises – the urban crisis with inequalities in access to the city, the migration crisis, the environmental crisis – operating at different

scales: the body, the street and the city, which are concerned with daily mobilities; the national and international scale where the fate of migrants is at stake; and the global scale where the mobility of resources and people influences the climate.

Mathieu Gillot will compare cycling movements to highlight their similarities and differences, and identify their causes and forms, especially in relation to the cultural, urbanistic (geography, public space, etc.), historical and political characteristics of the three cities under consideration.

- Mexico City is one of the most populous and dense cities in the world, with 21 million inhabitants and 6200 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>; its pollution problems make it a hostile environment for cyclists. The Bicitekas collective, present in Mexico City since 1997, is particularly active around the issue of air quality. During the pandemic, it created a bicycle donation system to help health care workers to get around.
- San Francisco is the second densest city in the United States, with an urban area of just under 5 million inhabitants and a density of 1500 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. With its famous hills, it features significant variations in elevation that strongly impact mobility and are challenging for cyclists. San Francisco is the cradle of the Critical Masses, first appearing in the 1990s as a form of cycling direct action that led to the adoption of a Bicycle Plan in 2009. The city is also known for being a hotspot of counterculture and tolerance, which influences the demands made by the cycling movements.
- Finally, with a population of 2.5 million, Vancouver is the smallest of the three cities in the study. Its particular geography, caught between the sea, the mountains and bordering the United States, has limited its geographical expansion and led to a high density, with 5500 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. In the 1980s, an alternative mobility policy to cars, based on public transport and active modes, was introduced. As the only city in North America not to be traversed by a highway, Vancouver is often cited as one of the most livable cities in the world. It is also a city in which several public policies rely on public consultation. The city's cycling movements seek to maintain this favorable environment.

## Methodology

The project will be conducted as part of a bicycle trip from Mexico City to Vancouver. In the different cities, interviews will be conducted with key players in the cycling movements, supplemented by an analysis of the documents produced by these mobilizations (flyers, logos, posters, etc.) and by a participant observation during the events.

This project follows another project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, which studied cycling movements in several South American cities. The case of Santiago de Chile was the subject of an article in the "Southern Diaries" section.

Results are expected in January 2023.

## 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.

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**Associated Thematics :**

**Lifestyles**

- Alternative mobilities
- Aspirations
- Living environments

**Policies**

- Civic Action
- Ecological transition
- Cycling & Walking

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