

1. Projects



EVOLMOB - A change in the way young people relate to cars

Finished research

Car use has declined in most OCDE countries since the early 2000s; for the first time since the end of World War II, there has been a drop in the proportion of young people who choose to get their driver's license. The goal of the EVOLMOB study was to get a better understanding of what this trend means for the future. To do this, it specifically focused on young people's travel behaviors in three regional cities: Lyon, Grenoble (France) and Montreal (Canada). What relationship do young people have with the car in these urban regions today? What are the drivers of the changes observed in these different economic, geographic and social contexts? The research results are now in.

Research participants

The French team

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The Canadian team

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I. The research

While the overall number of people with driver's licenses has continued to rise in OECD countries (Japan, the U.S., Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, Australia, Canada, France, etc.) , there has been a downward trend among youth since the 2000s. In most of these countries, people in the 30 and under age bracket are less likely to get their driver's license than they were 10 or 20 years ago. Several explanations have been put forward: while some researchers highlight economic factors such as higher fuel prices and the impact of the economic crisis on buying power, others point to cultural factors, suggesting that the car has been replaced by the Smartphone as a symbol and vector of freedom for young people .

EVOLMOB sought to understand the reasons for and consequences of the decline in driver's licenses among young people in France and Canada. What relationship do young people have with the car? What are the drivers of the changes observed in these different economic, geographic and social contexts?

The survey was conducted by researchers from three institutions: LAET-Transport, Urban Planning and Economics Laboratory (France), Polytechnique Montreal (Canada) and the Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique (Canada). The Mobile Lives Forum was at the initiative of the qualitative component of the research. The young people surveyed (aged 16 to 35) had diverse social (professional/student status, income level, gender, family status) and geographic backgrounds (urban/suburban areas of Lyon/Montreal). The quantitative component was based on the most recent household travel surveys for cities of Lyon, Grenoble and Montreal (partially funded by the interdepartmental program PREDIT). The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods helped paint a picture of young people's relationship to the car today. This project is in keeping with the Mobile Lives Forum's first line of research: Understanding: From mobility to immobility. How do we experience mobility today?

The study, which began in March 2014, gave way to results in early 2016.

II. The results

Getting a driver's license: a trend reversal

After decades of increase in the rate of driver's licenses among men and, later, women, France is seeing a drop in the proportion of driver's licenses among young people (-9% among 18-30 year olds between 1993-2008).

This drop is most notable in the under 25 age bracket:

- **In Lyon (1995 - 2006)** : 2% drop among people aged 18-24 (from 65 to 64%), a slight decline among 25-29 year olds (1%).
This drop was most notable for young inner city residents (4% for 18-24 year olds).
- **In Grenoble (2002-2010)**, where the data is more recent, and the trend seems to have intensified:
A 10% drop among men aged 18-25. The rate of driver's licenses among men drops from 81 to 73%.
A 14% drop among women aged 18-25. The rate of driver's licenses among women drops from 71 to 61%.

2. An increasing proportion of young people without cars

- **In Lyon (1995–2006):** the proportion of carless households:
a 20% increase among 18-24 year-olds (from 20% to 24%);
a 67% increase among 25-29 year-olds (from 12% to 19%); +46% among 30-34 year-olds (from 11 to 16%).
- **In Grenoble (2002-2010):** the proportion of carless households among 16-34 year-olds: a 46% increase. There was an increase in the proportion of carless households (from 11% to 16%).

3. Car use decreasing in favor of public transportation and cycling

In France, car trips for all age groups have decreased by 10%. This phenomenon is particularly marked among young people.

- **In Lyon (1995–2006):** A 16% drop in the number of car trips as driver for all age groups. This decrease also extends to the number of trips as a car passenger.
A 30% drop among 18-24 year-olds (as driver and passenger).
A 36% drop among 25-34 year-olds (as driver and passenger).
- **In Grenoble (2002–2010):** A 18% drop in the number of trips for all age groups.
A 23% drop among both men and women aged 16-34 (as drivers and passengers).

The decrease in the kilometers driven was smaller than that of the number of trips because trip distances have increased. There was a sharp increase in the number of trips by alternative mode (active modes and public transport most notably) among 18-34 year olds in Lyon between 1995 and 2006.

- **In Lyon (1995–2006):** for 18-43 year olds:
A 12% drop in the number of kilometers driven.
A 39% increase in kilometers traveled by public transportation.
- **In Grenoble :** (2002-2010):
A 16% drop in the number of kilometers driven by men aged 16-34, and a 12% drop among women for the same age group.
A 93% increase in the number of kilometers traveled by public transportation among men aged 16-34, and a 42% increase among women for the same age group.
Even young people with a license and car do not use the latter systematically or exclusively. This finding highlights a decoupling between the fact of having a driver's license and car, and actually driving every day. This tendency significantly contributes to the decline in the proportion of car trips relative to all trips.
- **In Lyon (1995–2006):**
A 30% drop in car trips (as car driver) among drivers aged 18-34 among those with a license and a car.
- **In Grenoble (2002-2010):** The same trend was observed for regular drivers aged 16-34.
For the latter: Increase in the number of regular public transportation users: from 13% to 17% for men and from 19% to 22% for women.
Increase in regular bicycle users: from 11% to 18% for men and 6% to 8% for women.

Canadian results pending

Car use: thriving or losing speed?

A very recent study published by the ObSoCo and Chronos[1] confirms that cars are still heavily used by 16-34 year olds: in France, 50% of 18-24 year olds and 64% of 25-34 year olds use a car almost daily. For the majority of 18-34 year olds, owning a car is always the best option (preferable to renting, sharing or not having one). However, EVOLMOB shows that the car's place is less important in the practices of 16-34 year olds, nowadays, than for previous generations, at the same age, and particularly for those living in urban centers. The research highlights a trend break in the acquisition of driver's licenses, the purchasing of cars and car use among young people which, for the first time in decades, have declined. This is a historic shift in car culture. The qualitative part of the research shows that the car has indeed lost its luster.

4. A profound change in young people's relationship to the car

The decrease in the number of young people getting their driver's licenses reflects a profound change in the relationship to the car. Economic factors play a role. In France notably, the cost of getting a driver's license is in itself a limiting factor; buying, using and maintaining a car is even harder in a relatively difficult economic climate. But the developments highlighted here are not only a response to cyclical economic issues: while the largest decline (in Lyon and Grenoble) was observed among people with the lowest incomes, a marked drop was also observed the most educated (whose incomes were the highest).

It would appear that, for the young people interviewed, getting a driver's license and a car have lost their status as 'rites of passage' into adulthood and vectors of freedom (except among some young women of humble origin, who regard them as tools of emancipation); other experiences (such as traveling abroad) tend to play this role now.

Nowadays, a driver's license is largely considered like any other qualification, skill or degree that is useful to have (to put on a CV, for example), but that one does not necessarily use, especially in downtown areas, where travel alternatives abound. Nowadays, people get a license when they have the time and the resources but generally give priority to their education.

" My parents didn't push me to get a license, they forced me. They told me I'd need it later, and when that the day came, I'd have it. "(Tiana, 23)

Used increasingly less automatically and exclusively, the car has become but one solution in a wide array of mobility solutions from among which young people can choose. The findings of the quantitative and qualitative research come together to highlight a "decoupling" of the fact of having a license and a car, and actually driving every day. The availability of the public transportation offering, and to a lesser extent mobility services (self-service bicycles, etc.), influences the choice of travel mode.

" We gain autonomy by understanding everything that exists as a means of transport because we know how to use them better ." (Mark, 32)

This trend, if actualized, would bring about profound changes in mobility in the years to come.

Most young people are environmentally aware, thanks to ecology lessons at school. This results in greater awareness of the environmental impact of car use (pollution). The environment is not a decisive factor for most young people in regards to their travel habits, but it may help reinforce choices in favor of the use of public transport and/or active modes (cycling and walking).

However, nothing in the study supports the idea that ICT (information and communications technology) has played a role in young people's changing relationship to the car.

Finally, the car no longer symbolizes a dream. Viewed mainly as a functional object by the young people interviewed, it is longer considered a status symbol: on the contrary, it is regarded as increasingly burdensome in downtown areas (expensive, difficult to park, etc.).

" *Driving in the city is horrible! You have to find a spot, and pay... it's more of a hassle than anything else. For me, the car doesn't mean freedom.* " (Anaïs, 22)

This trend likewise appears to be gaining ground outside of city centers though to a lesser extent, due most likely to more limited transportation supply, making car use often unavoidable.

III. Documents and reports

Online publication of the following reports: (In French)

VI. Current research

The Mobile Lives Forum will be organizing a conference on the research result in Saint-Denis in early 2017.

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

Associated Thematics :

Lifestyles

- Cars / motorcycles
- Aspirations
- Change in practices
- Diversity of lifestyles
- Representations

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Jean-Baptiste Frétigny, Christophe Gay, Jean-Marc Offner



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Laurent Cailly, Marie Huyghe, Nicolas Oppenchain

1 <http://www.groupechronos.org/les-activites-de-chronos/veille-et-analyse-strategiques/observatoire-des-mobilites-emergentes-vague-2-les-nouveaux-comportements-et-arbitrages-des-francais-en-matiere-de-mobilite>

2 <https://fr.forumviesmobiles.org/projet/2016/09/20/evolmob-evolution-rapport-des-jeunes-voiture-2424>

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