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Mobility



Submitted by Vincent Kaufmann on Mon, 09/21/2020 - 11:20

Short definition

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.

Mobility and travel

Mobility encompasses all the physical movements of an individual or group.

These movements are characterized by:

- their **quantity**: distances travelled and time spent moving
- their **regularity**: the number of trips made
- the **mode of transport used** (walking, cycling, car, train, plane...)
- the **motive** (shopping, health, work, accompanying someone, holidays...)

These characteristics of movement are interdependent. For example, depending on the chosen mode of transport, the journey happens more or less quickly, and the time spent moving is therefore more or less long. Another example: the regularity of a trip depends on its motive - grocery shopping is more recurrent than holidays. Finally, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) can contribute to the

transformation of these movements by facilitating them (applications to calculate or follow a route), by substituting them (telework, Skype chats) or by combining with them (exchanging emails or text messages during a train trip).

Mobility and lifestyles

The Mobile Lives Forum focuses on how trips structure lifestyles. These trips can be:

- **daily:** work, running, health, accompanying someone, sports, leisure, walking...
- **less frequent:** travel, job mobility...
- **rare:** moving homes, migration...

The space that travel occupies in people's lifestyles is what makes them more or less mobile and what determines how fast- or slow-paced their life is.

An individual's lifestyle and travel practices are constructed interdependently with those of the people he/she meets, as their mobility (parents, partner, children, friends, neighbors...) influences his/her own mobility. We know, for example, that some "highly-mobile professionals"^[^1] are only able to be so mobile because they have relatives who are relatively immobile and who take care of the home, the garden, the children...

Mobility and life course

Mobility holds a different place in the lifestyle of a person or a group:

- Depending on **socio-economic characteristics:** age, gender, degree level, income level... A disadvantaged young teenager doesn't have the same travel practices as a 40-year-old senior executive. We know, for example, that the richest and most educated people travel faster (64km/h for the highest bracket) than the others (40km/h for the lowest bracket).^[^2]
- Depending on the **territory in which people live:** the landscape, territorial dynamics, infrastructure, urban density and building density. The mobility of people living in a large metropolis like Paris has nothing to do with the mobility of people living in a remote valley in the Vosges. We know, for instance, that it's in urban units between 10,000 and 50,000 inhabitants that travel times are the shortest: 9h20mins per week versus 12h45mins within Paris.^[^3]

- Depending on **physical ability** (age, temporary or permanent disability).

Travel practices change over the course of life: moving homes, having a child, a divorce, moving in with a parent/partner/roommate, changing jobs, etc.

Environmental and social impacts

Mobility is a huge source of freedom: being able to travel to see friends, family, go to various hobbies, or go on holiday. But mobility is also a source of enormous constraints, with multiple consequences on our lives:

- **Social impacts:** trips that are frequent and long, especially when they are forced, are a source of fatigue and stress. For example, divorce rates among “highly-mobile people” are higher than average^[4]. Mobility is also a source of social inequalities: contemporary travel requires, among other things, the acquisition of skills (driver's license, the ability to use various modes of transport, the ability to use the internet, knowledge of foreign languages, etc.) and access to certain resources (possession of a vehicle, the ability to live near transport networks and infrastructure, etc.).
- **Environmental impacts:** Contemporary mobility relies 95% on oil, and is based on a complex socio-technical system: industries (oil and automotive), major transport infrastructure (highways, airports) and energy supply, natural resources (oil),... Contemporary mobility thus contributes to major environmental problems such as local air pollution and global warming. It is also a source of noise pollution (cars, trains) and visual pollution (infrastructure).
- **Spatial impacts:** Contemporary mobilities (travelling more, faster, further) have transformed people’s relationship to space. Transport speeds^[5] have allowed the development of new lifestyles based on the reversibility of travel - that is, the ability to make quick round trips over long distances - and thus to connect, on a daily basis, territories that couldn’t have been reached as such before. With increasing transport speeds, it isn’t the time spent moving that decreases, but the distances traveled that increase. This upsets traditional territorial configurations: urban concentration, the development of megacities, urban sprawl, periurbanization and urbanization of the countryside, the isolation of certain territories.

The experience of movement

Mobility can thus be defined as a set of **physical movements**: a relationship to space, over time, which must be minimized (time spent moving, and distances travelled) to reduce the effort required and for environmental reasons...

But these physical movements are also linked to how people **live them**: the way in which these movements are experienced (as a constraint, a suffering, a pleasure, as alone-time...).

You take into account the feeling, the satisfaction you get from them: for example, making a trip or going for a ride by foot or bicycle rather than by car or subway, to feel the wind on your face, to do physical exercise, pollute less, or even make a detour to go through this or that neighborhood. Travel sometimes becomes an activity in its own right: the pleasure of strolling through a shared public space, a train journey that allows you to cross beautiful landscapes... The trip can also be experienced as a break, separating work and family life, or as a moment of alone-time, a bubble of tranquility: working on the train without being interrupted, listening to music in the car.

The goal isn't necessarily to reduce the journey time or distances travelled, but to gain in quality of life.

Mobility and representations

Our movements are associated with particular representations or meanings.

By taking on a positive value (it is well regarded to go far away on vacation, to move or study abroad, to travel regularly for work...), mobility has become a value in itself. The discourse encouraging movement is omnipresent. Travelling has become a necessity, a permanent injunction: to find a job for example, even if it involves moving homes or extended travel times.

Mobility is also socially coded: while the movements of some are particularly valued (jet setters, Westerners, tourists,...), others don't enjoy the same recognition (the woman who spend their days accompanying their children to their activities, or shopping or visiting dependent parents). Others still arouse suspicion and are

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perceived as dangerous (migrants, nomads). Depending on whether a person has a university degree or not, is woman or a man, is white or of color, their movements aren't seen and experienced in the same way.

<!-- Notes -->

[^1]: Highly-mobile people are people who travel frequently and repeatedly for their work. This lifestyle concerns long-distance commuters (back and forth between home and work) or bi-residents (people who have a foothold in the city where they work and who return to their homes every week)

<https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/video/2014/02/18/highly-mobile-or-highly-sedentary-2176>

[^2]: Source: National Mobility and Lifestyles Survey by the Mobile Lives Forum

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

[^3]: Source: National Mobility and Lifestyles Survey by the Mobile Lives Forum

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

[^4]: Source: JobMob research

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

[^5]: Source: <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/travel-speed-12977>

Visuel

Mobility

Activer

Désactivé

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Désactivé

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