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► **To cite this version:**

Catherine Didier-Fèvre. Young commuters in the peri-urban environment : Are they specific users of public transportation?. Proceedings of the 1st EURUFU Scientific Conference, 2013, 1st EURUFU Scientific Conference, pp.35-44. halshs-01145749

HAL Id: halshs-01145749

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01145749>

Submitted on 27 Apr 2015

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Young commuters in the peri-urban environment : Are they specific users of public transportation ?

**Young commuters in the peri-urban environment:
Are they specific users of public transportation ?**

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ABSTRACT

Around the Great Paris, in the Bassin parisien, urban sprawl is now getting into the rural areas. People have moved there to get some housing property. Most of them are families with children. Some of them are teenagers. They live in a periurban environment, an intermediary zone between rural and urban areas and have to go to high school every day. Most of the pupils commute to and from their suburban home, to and from school by the public transportation, which is the only means of transport they can afford.

They think about this way as a good way of commuting for them. It is a space which is out of reach of parents. It's the opportunity for young people to design their own teenage world. They are definitely not prisoners in suburban areas. If some of them do not feel like moving, most of them have the impression they control their way of commuting. They walk a lot once they have arrived in Sens and when they are off school. Going downtown with friends is the way of feeling free. They cope with the territory and network they live in and they juggle and mix with different means of transport. They are a resourceful category of people.

1 INTRODUCTION

Around the Great Paris, in the Bassin parisien, urban sprawl is now getting into the rural areas. People have moved there to get some housing property. Most of them are families with children. Some of them are teenagers and they are in a three way state of „*space-in-between*“ because they are in a stage in life when childhood milestones tend to disappear and new adult specificities take over. They live in a periurban environment, an intermediary zone between rural and urban areas. Besides, their parents belong to the middle class („*Les petits moyens*“ [1]). Most of them have continued to commute to Paris area or to medium-sized around such as Sens.

Yet as the peri-urban space is still a youth space amidst an ageing society: statistically it takes three youth for two elderly. Surprisingly, very few papers have been written on peri-urban youth.

Hence, the theme of mobility as far as young people are concerned is a new one. The importance of age is a key to understand the ties the inhabitants have with their homes. These young people live in the peri-urban space of Sens (East of Ile-de-France, 68 miles from Paris) and have to go to high school every day. They live in a lot of little villages (from 300 up to 4000 inhabitants), far from the nearest town, which of 15 miles away. A lot of them are what we call new countrymen. The Conseil Général de l'Yonne is in charge of the school runs mobility in the suburban area.

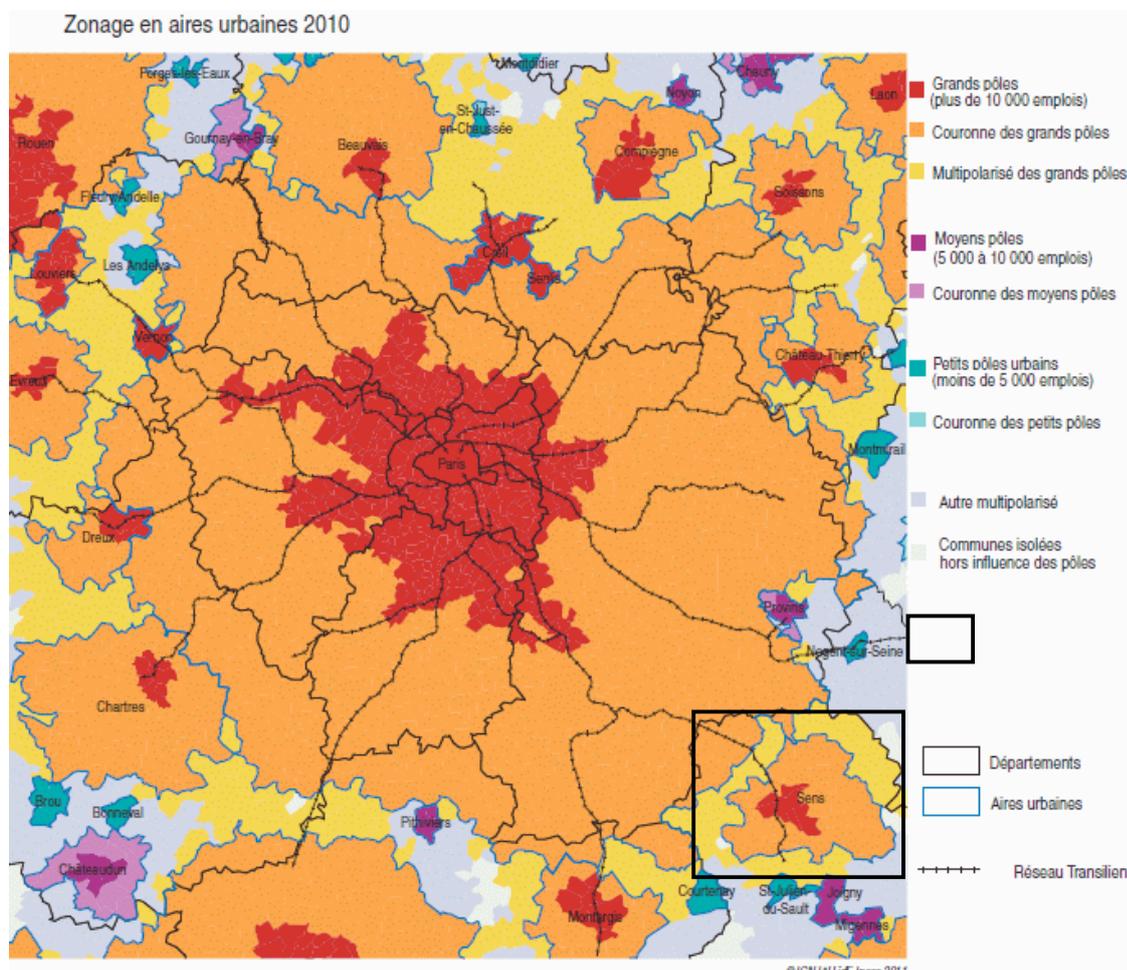


Figure 1 : the periurban field work

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Most of the pupils commute to and from their suburban home, to and from school by the public transportation, which is the only means of transport they can afford.

Are they specific users of public transport? Can the time they spend on transports be considered as a space of freedom for them? What do they do while commuting? Do they feel prisoners of the suburban areas they live in?

In order to tackle these questions in depth, I have been working on data provided by both the Lycée Janot of Sens and the Conseil Général de l'Yonne. I have also conducted a series of interviews with about fifty pupils attending the Lycée Janot.

2 THE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SPECIALLY ORGANISED FOR THEM

2.1 A network which serve specially the high school

The lycée Janot is the only public secondary school in the north of the department of Yonne. So, half of the pupils who attend this school live in many villages (from 300 up to 4000 inhabitants), distant from Sens, the nearest town, which is 15 miles away. Sens is a little town of the East of the Bassin parisien, 68 miles away from Paris. 35000 inhabitants live in this town. Most of the pupils commute to and from their suburban home, to and from school by the public transport, which is the only means of transport they can afford.



Figure 2 : The town of Sens and the peri-urban villages in the openfield

The Conseil Général de l'Yonne is the local council in charge of the school runs mobility in the suburban area. Every year it draws specific routes for students. „*Planning and providing transport in rural areas present particular challenges, a function of often large geographic areas and low*

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population densities.“ [2] The pupils arrive at 8 a.m. for the first lesson and they leave school at 6 p.m. So the bus tables are adapted to the lycée timetables. Although the bus routes and services are specifically scheduled for the students, everybody is allowed to take the bus to commute to their job, for example. However, bus services are not so practical for people who have a job. Only two buses lines have a stop at the place where the students live: a very early bus leads to the lycée, and a late one takes students back home at 7 p.m. Consequently, the rural areas (the peri-urban environment) tend to be poorly served by public transport.

2.2 A specific rate for some of them



Figure 3 : <http://www.cg89.fr/Sports-et-Jeunesse/Transports-scolaires>

Any pupil attending the lycée whose at least one parent live in the Yonne department is allowed in the department can take the bus to go to school. They need a bus pass. The cost is totally endorsed by the Conseil Général de l'Yonne, the local council. This bus pass costs 750€ per pupil a year.

Youths who would like to take the bus without the pass (because the parent the teenager lives with doesn't have full rights to custody or because the youth goes to a private school) have to pay a two-euro fare. They can't buy a pass. They have to pay for each ride, which is quite costly eventually. The Conseil Général de l'Yonne doesn't entice them to pay the 750€ pass. So, most of them tend to dodge the fare. They tell the bus driver they have forgotten their pass or that they will get one soon. The students who still attend the lycée after the bachelor degree (students of BTS) can't have a free pass, so they have to pay or to use another way to go to school (car, train if possible, car-sharing, scooter). When I commuted on the school bus to go to my job (I had to pay a two-euro single fare), I could hear two or three students, on average, lying to the bus driver about their pass. Eventually, the bus driver often allowed them on the bus, without paying, until early December. For three months, they managed to take the bus for free. It's resourcefulness, a first step to manage on their life!

3 THE IMPORTANCE PLACE TAKEN BY THE COMMUNTING IN THE DAY OF THE LYCEE JANOT'S PUPILS

3.1 A large part of the day

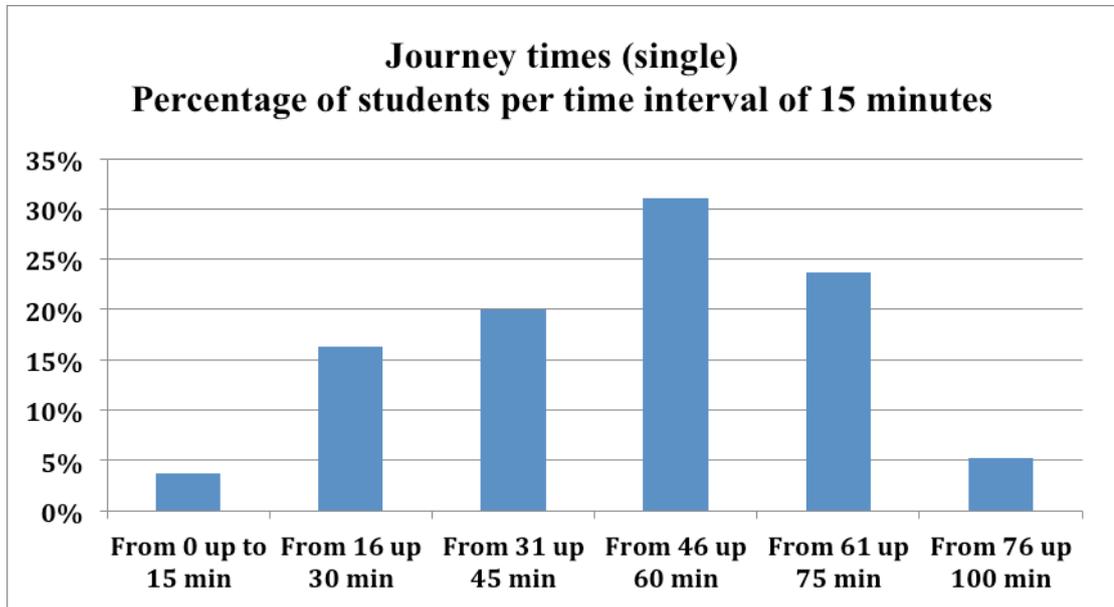


Figure 4 : database of the sample

The time spent in commuting is very long. Every day 30% of the pupils spend more than one and a half hour on public transports. Some of them live in villages nearby but the bus route is rather long. So they have to wake up early to take the bus, most of the buses start their service before 6 am. The pupils who commute for about 100 minutes to the lycée could choose to sleep at the boarding school. But, most of them don't want to leave home, they are very attached to their family and they prefer spending much time on the bus every day. They are afraid of living in community. „I don't like the boarding school (though she has never been). I need to see my parents every day“ Olivia, Egriselles-Le-Bocage, 17.

3.2 How pupils spend their time during commuting?

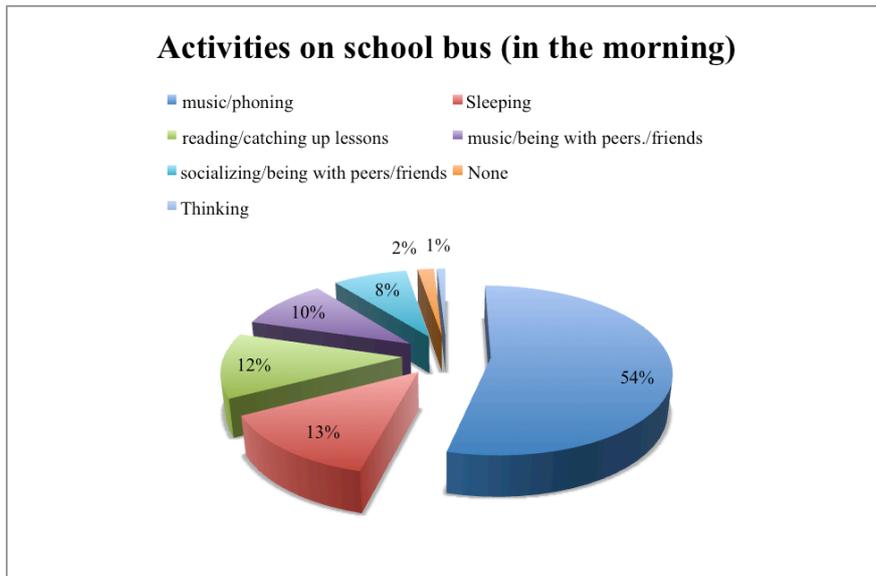


Figure 5 : database of the sample

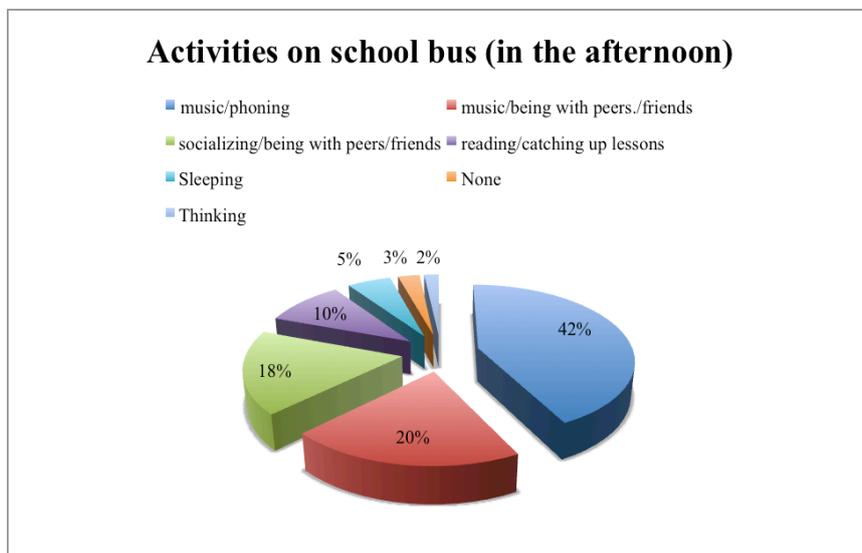


Figure 6 : database of the sample

As the time of commuting is long, pupils have time to do a lot of things. With the help of a paper questionnaire filled in by my own pupils from the lycée (where I teach History and Geography), I have asked them about their activities during the journey. I learn much about their activities. Morning activities are different from the ones they have in the evening.

They spend a lot of time using the mobile phone and listening to music both in the morning and in the evening. Some of them need some sleep on the bus and get some more rest! It's usual to hear them snoring on the bus in the morning! At the end of the day, they mostly talk with one another. Only a few of them do their homework, around 10%. But there is no light on the bus, reading is quite difficult. Using a phone is easy. Some of them play video games or watch films on their phone screens.

The way they allocate time for the activities in the morning is different from they way they do it in the evening. In the morning it is more about being with oneself. More than 75% of the students have solitary activities at this time of the day. 54% admit they use their mobile phone. This allows them to listen to music or text friends. Again this is something they do on their own. In an article about mobile phones, Pascal Lardellier [3] show how important to teenagers the relationship with this object can be. The mobile phone is described as „an intimate shelter“ It is a real expansion of the self. It is the very center of intimacy (where texts, photos, videos, directories, music are stored). It is quite normal that teenage activities should be connected the use of mobile phone when it comes to commuting on buses.

4 THE TIME OF COMMUTING: A TIME FOR THEMSELVES, A ENCHANTED EPISODE?

4.1 Those who enjoy this time of commuting

Those who like this time of commuting say: „It is convenient, and it doesn't take any longer than if I went by car.“ (Océane, Gisy Les Nobles, 17 years), „because it's free!“ (Walter, Gisy les Nobles, 15 years). The importance of the transport is showed by Sophie (Pont sur Yonne, 15 years) : „It's essential for me to get to school as my mother can't give me a lift. If I miss the bus, I miss the whole day at school basically. However, I find the journey a bit long.“ These young people often have no other alternative means of transport. The school bus is the link between their home and their friends. Attending the lycée is the best way to see friends. Being with peers is central in teenage life.

The bus is a place where friendship is at stake. „I rather like it as you stay with your friends“ (Pauline, Armeau, 15 years). „The journey is not that long and it makes you feel good when you're on the bus, you can listen to music and in the evening, it's better, it's more fun.“ Tracy, Pont-sur-Yonne, 17 years. Agathe (Chaumont, 15 years) likes the bus because it embodies her own territory. „I don't like my parents giving me a lift to school.“ To her, going to school is a time where she could be free to do what she wants. The time of commuting help the teenager build up his/her personality. Young people are then out of reach of their parents.

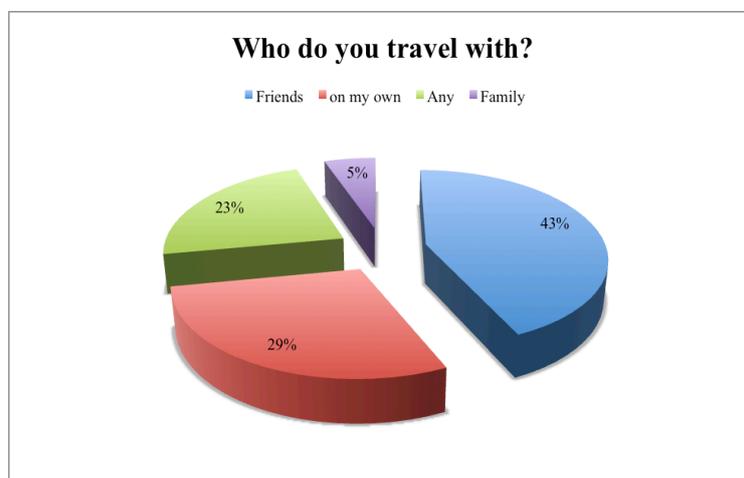


Figure 7 : database of the sample

Taking the bus to the lycée is different as Amélie (Vinneuf, 17) says. She describes commuting as a quite quiet moment: „I feel fine and I can be on my own then.“ She compares her current experience with the bus transporting younger teenagers (from 11 up to 15) when she used to go the collège. It was

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a noisy place. She prefers going on a bus to the lycée. *„I feel this is different from then even if it is now a longer distance“.*

4.2 Those who think this time is lost time

Pupils using the bus think about this way as a good way of commuting for them. Some of them would like to be given a lift by car (57% of the bus passengers) if they could. 24% of the users think that taking the bus is the best way to get to school and they don't want to use any other way to get there. Véronique Mondou [4] considers the pupils as *„prisonners of the transport“*. They are too young to drive and few of them have a scooter. V. Mondou thinks when they are adults, they will drive a car but won't take the bus any more.

For people living in the peri-urban environment, driving is faster and more convenient than take the bus. So as soon as teenagers get the driving licence, they prefer to use a car if they have one. For them, being an adult also means you don't have to stick to some rules such as bus tables, routes.... Most of them think taking the bus is a waste of time, as Malo says (Champigny-sur-Yonne) : *„It takes me almost one more hour every day, but it's a waste of time because you learn nothing“*. Students often discuss the bus tables : *„School buses rounds are badly organized. I arrive 30 mns before the first lesson and I leave 20 mins after the last one ! “* (Clément, Villeneuve/Yonne, 15).

If they could, they would use the car. Objective and psychological reasons explain their choice. *„Because I'm with my parents, so a car lift is more quiet and private.“* (Cassandra, Cerisiers, 17 years). For Samantha (Maillot, 17 years), *„In the car, you get heating and air-conditioning it would take longer if I went by bus. So I can leave home later and wake up later“*

The car „cocoon“ is often favoured. *„As soon as I get my driving licence, I'll buy a car because when you're in a car, you don't have to put the headphones on to listen to the music I like“*. (Marion, Michery, 17). The way bus transport is organised is seen as a problem. *„The coach comes too early“*, (Cindy, Foissy-sur-Vanne, 15). The bus stop is too far away from home : *„I have to walk to the bus stop which is 1 km away from home.“* (Jason, Cuy, 18 ans). Missing the bus is yet another issue. *„Driving means you, can't miss the bus !“* (Caroline, Nailly, 17) Catherine (Sergines, 19), who has had her driving licence since February, says she drives to school more regularly : *„I am so lazy! I can get up later. It spares me half an hour“*. She considers that public transport is a waste of time. By car, the journey lasts quarter of an hour whereas by coach/bus, it takes 35 minutes.

So, some of them try to juggle with several means of transports. They ask their family for a lift to school. They sometimes ask their friends too. They experience car-sharing with others students. A few of them hitchhike to go back home and they walk a lot. *„Walking was destination-oriented, generally regarded a functional mode of transport, and shaped by economics choices and constraints.“* [5]

Students cannot be considered as „prisoners“ of suburban areas. They cope with the territory and network they live in and they juggle and mix with different means of transport. They are a resourceful category of people.

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Conclusion :

Lionel Rougé [6], in his study about people living in the peri-urban environment of Toulouse (South West of France), in 2006, showed these people can be compared to prisoners of the peri-urban space. They have moved there to get some housing property and in some cases one of the parents (mothers mainly) has stopped to work. Housewives or retired people who live in the suburban area can't afford to move and they feel prisoners of their own way of life. For years they are busy bringing up children or doing the housework. They don't own a car (it would be too costly), so they can't move.

To my surprise, I realised that these pupils are not that imprisoned in suburban areas. They have to commute every day, unlike housewives or retired people. One has to keep in mind that pupils are a specific part of customers commuting every day.

These pupils ride to school by bus, which is the only means of transport they can afford. They think about this way as a good way of commuting for them. Guillaume Macher [7], in the study about teenagers and the town, showed that the time they spend on means of transports is a space of freedom. I agree with him. It is a space which is out of reach of parents. It's the opportunity for young people to design their own teenage world. During the interviews, I discovered that even if the parents might be strict about some aspects of commuting, most pupils do not respect the parents' rules. For example, Mélissa (Jouy, 17)'s parents forbade her to go to her boyfriend's home (in the town of Sens, near the lycée). However, Mélissa visits him every day in the morning before her first lesson at school. She is used to lying to her parents when in the evening they ask her about what she did in the morning.

They are definitely not prisoners. If some of them do not feel like moving, most of them have the impression they control their way of commuting. They walk a lot once they have arrived in Sens and when they are off school. Going downtown with friends is the way of feeling free.

Victoria (Pont-sur-Yonne, 15) has sent me a lot of photos about her week activities. She had to fill in a „transport booklet“ providing all the information about the way she used urban transport. She recorded her notes about what the activities she likes doing the most after school. She mentions the opportunity to go to downtown and have a break at Pat'à Pain (a fast food chain) near the lycée. During the week, except on Fridays, she leaves school and walks to a fast food restaurant with her friends or goes shopping downtown (after she has bought some pastry at Pat'à Pain). When you have a look at her pictures, no doubt she can feel free and is in no way a prisoner.

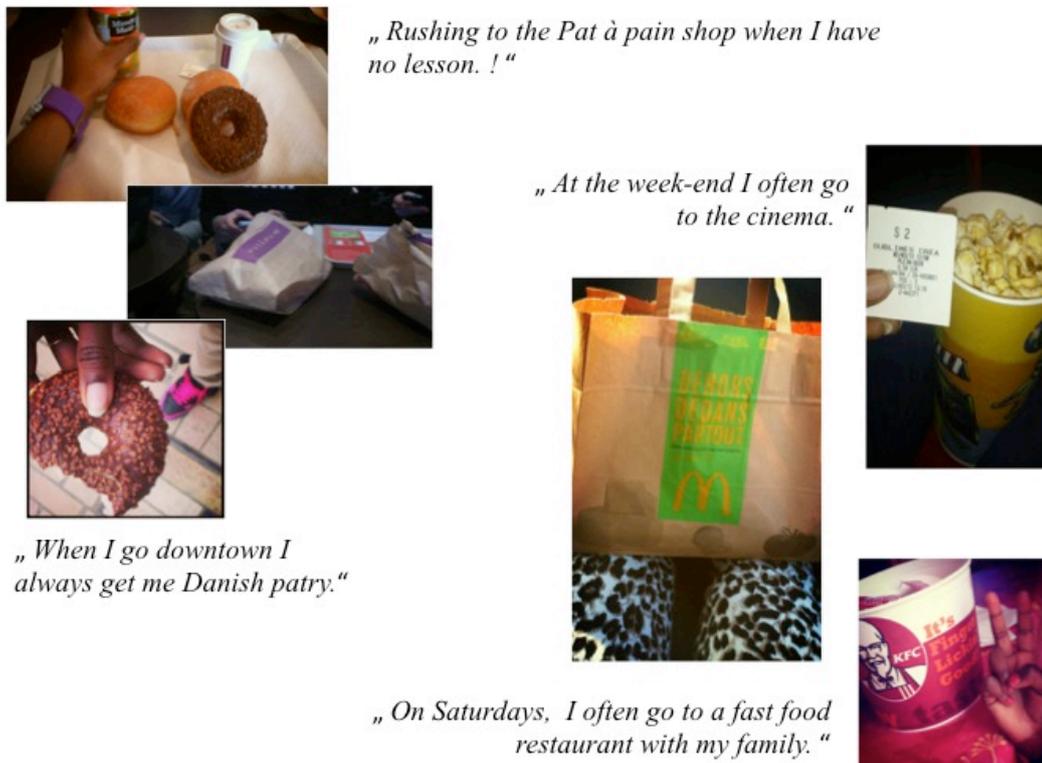


Figure 8 : The Victoria's week, photos made by Victoria

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