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The decline in car use. A long-lasting effect? French and Canadian young adults' relationship with mobility

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Abstract

Many Western countries are thought to have attained a *car peak*, this being especially true of urban areas. The car is viewed as having lost some of its appeal, with other modes of transport gaining favour. The change in people's means of getting about can mostly be seen among the young, who are using cars less and are less inclined to take the driving test than in previous decades. One view is that the reduced tendency to obtain a driving licence is merely a delay which will gradually be made up for later on, even though it does seem probable that the numbers of people holding a driving licence remain lower. It is on this point that we have chosen to focus our attention, based on a qualitative survey carried out in Lyon (France) and Montreal (Canada), showing how mobility has evolved in the case of young adults aged around thirty. The article questions the relationship with the automobile and the reasons for the change in social practices by exiling the daily uses of different modes of transport.

Introduction

The paper focusses on the relationship between French and French Canadian young adults (aged between 27 and 35) and automobility in order to grasp the nature of the ongoing changes and the effects of the different types of socialisations on the current mobility of young people. Indeed, in many Western countries a 'car peak' (Goodwin & Van Dender 2013; Kuhn-

hof *et al.* 2013; Le Vine & Polak 2014; Metz 2013) is thought to have been attained, this being especially true of urban areas (Grimal *et al.* 2013; Hjorthol 2016). Hence, the car has lost some of its appeal in favour of other modes of transport (Oldenziel *et al.* 2016). The change can mostly be seen among young people, who use cars less and are less inclined to take the driving test than in previous decades (Delbosch & Currie 2013; Hjorthol 2016; Kuhnimhof *et al.* 2012; Pooley *et al.* 2005; Vincent-Geslin *et al.* 2017).

This decline is thought to be due to changes in the legal conditions for obtaining the driving licence notably in France, Canada and the United States (Avrillier *et al.* 2010; Delbosch & Currie 2013; Kuhnimhof *et al.* 2012; Licaj *et al.* 2012; Raimond & Milthorpe 2010). Favourable attitudes towards new technologies (Le Vine *et al.* 2014) and the opportunities for virtual relationships, online purchasing and other remote activities which can be carried out without physically moving, are also thought to account for the fewer journeys made (Aguiléra *et al.* 2012). This thesis, however, is brought into question by the analyses of young people's mobility (Delbosch & Currie 2013; Devaux *et al.* 2016; Massot & Zaffran 2007). Thus, while young people have been raised and socialised in a dominating car culture (Sheller 2004) which naturalises mobility attitudes (Rajan 2006), the new generations who are of an age to take financial responsibility for their spending consider transport in a more functional way, as tools serving more global ways of living (Hjorthol 2016). This more pragmatic relationship with the car is part of a context in which the period of youth has been extended (Van de Velde 2008). This has led to delayed parenthood, which in turn means different mobility needs (McLaren 2016). One view is that the reduced tendency to obtain a driv-

ing licence is merely a delay which will be made up for later on, even though it seems probable that the numbers of people holding a driving licence will remain lower (Frändberg & Vilhelmson 2011; Nordbakke *et al.* 2016).

Based on an analysis of young people's everyday practices of mobility and more generally of consumption, the paper aims to understand their current relationship with the car. Compared to today's teens, in both contexts young adults have been educated in a world where the place of the car was still dominant and unquestioned (Vincent-Geslin *et al.* 2017). Some differences exist, however, between France and Canada. In France, the driving licence was and still is expensive. Classes have to be taken in a driving school and, also, there is a written test that is known to be difficult for individuals with a low level of education to pass (Avrillier *et al.* 2010). Meanwhile, in Canada, the population of young adults observed mostly learned to drive with their parents and did not have to attend and therefore pay for driving classes. Despite these differences of access to a driving licence, most youths got one (Demoli 2014; Roux 2012). In France in particular (Kuhnimhof *et al.* 2012; Kuhnimhof *et al.* 2013) but also to a lesser extent in Canada, the relationship with the car is changing despite a lasting car-culture among the youths in this country noticeable through a youth culture that remains focused on car performance (Tilleczek 2011). In terms of access to other modes of transport, Montreal and Lyon both have good and relatively cheap public transport facilities, but, in both cities, the network in the suburbs is not as extensive as in central areas. The two cities have carpooling, bike-sharing and car-sharing.

Finally, in both countries, youths attend classes about sustainability, although in both cases the programme was much lighter at the time when today's young adults were receiving their education than it is nowadays. Thus, in both contexts, important public policies exist in terms of diversification of transport services and raising public awareness of environmental issues, particularly among young people. Questions relating to the future continuity of these policies are being posed at a political level, but their presence within education programmes remains a constant during the period of time under scrutiny. The article will first describe the methodology used. It will then seek to describe the nature of the relation to automobility to then reflect on the in-going changes and the drivers of new practices of mobility.

Methodology

The research is based on a quantitative and qualitative piece of research carried out through a mixed method investigation. In Lyon, the quantitative part of the research was done through secondary analysis of household travel surveys (EMD Lyon, 1995 et 2006)¹. In Montreal, an ad hoc quantitative inquiry has been conducted among the members of Communauto, a car sharing service. This inquiry was undertaken in order to help the team characterised youth behaviour in relation to distance

from public transport. However, due to the very different nature of the data used, no quantitative comparison can be made between the two countries.

About fifty interviews were also carried out with young people aged from sixteen to thirty-five in Lyon and Montreal. The age of sixteen was decided upon as the lower limit for the sample, because it is the minimum age required for being an accompanied driver. The upper limit of the sample was set at thirty-five, so as to take into account the role played by changes that occur at different stages of life (integration into the world of work, setting up home, birth of a child, etc.) on young people's relationship with the automobile. Furthermore, in Europe and Canada it has been observed that the phase of youth has been extended and a desynchronisation of the stages for entering adult life has developed. Becoming a couple and having a first child are events that notably tend to occur later and later nowadays. Thus, in France, the average age in 2009 for having a first child was thirty (Pison, 2010), as it was in Quebec in 2012 (Statistiques Canada, 2014). A diversity principle was applied in compiling the sample, particularly with regard to place of residence (centre, suburbs or outskirts), social origin and gender. Variations of age within the category and educational and professional situations were also taken into account. Through this diversity, the aim was to get a better overview of the nature of the changing relation to the car and we were looking for a variety of situations that could inform us about the ongoing phenomena perceived through the statistics in both countries.

Three means were used to recruit the young people to be questioned. First, the so-called 'snowball' method, which consists of mobilising the interviewers' interpersonal networks in order to find volunteers for the interviews. This method has the advantage of being quick and efficient for accessing people willing to be interviewed, while at the same time promoting acceptance of the survey and a relationship of trust in the interview situation. Other young people were recruited by means of a web questionnaire regarding travel habits, which was sent to Communauto users in Montreal and in France to people using the Lyon car sharing application. Although there were not enough responses from within France to permit us to conduct a statistical analysis of the results, we were nevertheless able to get into contact with some users of the car sharing and bike sharing system, since, at the end of the questionnaire, people could leave their names and addresses in order to be re-contacted. This additional method of recruitment allowed us to widen the network of interviewees and target users of alternative means of transport such as car-pooling, car-sharing and self-service bikes, or those with specific profiles – notably age, professional situation or place of abode. The third method, adopted in order to overcome the difficulty of finding very young and working-class interviewees who were not found through the first means of inquiry, consisted, in the case of Lyon, of appealing to contacts in a secondary school for professional training located in a working-class suburb of the Lyon urban area. Our request was sent to several classes, and this enabled us to diversify the Lyon sample further still. In Montreal, differences were also taken into account when comparing the daily travel options available at the locations where young people in Lyon and Montreal resided. We therefore took availability of transport and distance from the centre into account when describing the areas being

1. These works have been carried out within the framework of the EvolMob project, a Franco-Quebec research project financed by the Predit and the Vies Mobiles Forum and jointly led by the Transport, Urban Planning and Economics Laboratory (Lyon), the INRS (Montreal) and the École Polytechnique de Montréal (Ortar *et al.* 2015; Licaj *et al.* 2014).

surveyed. We also tried to include each of these areas in the survey so as to test the hypothesis of differences in behaviour which might be found on each side of the Atlantic – differences produced by the availability of transport and density of population.

The interviews were about everyday mobility, starting with childhood, so as to grasp the socialisation conditions of daily travel practices and their possible changes over time. Travel practices other than daily ones were also taken into account in order to assess the journeys of young people in their totality. Consumption practices other than transport, including culinary practices, were examined. This enabled us to learn more about the nature of consumption amongst young people and to understand whether the observed practices form part of a wider pattern of changes.

To grasp the nature of the ongoing changes previous research conducted by Nathalie Ortar (Ortar 2014, 2016a) have shown that the analysis of transport practices cannot be understood without relating these to other daily usage practices. This consideration is directly influenced by the works of Elizabeth Shove (Shove 2010; Shove *et al.* 2009) on the various applications of practice theory within the field of sociology. Due to some lexical differences between the French spoken in France and Quebec, the analysis has been done by type of content using N'Vivo software. The article seeks to take stock of the changes that arise in terms of mobility, or even the mere perception of mobility, of young adults, and thereby understand the persistent nature of changes. It also looks at the normative and political frameworks that have a bearing on the irreversible nature of changes.

Automobility is still a social norm

In France, as in Quebec, young adults have been raised in a society which does not question the use of the car, and where obtaining one's driving licence is a prerequisite for becoming an adult (Masclat 2002; Tilleczek 2011). By not passing the driving test, and therefore not being entitled to take to the road, individuals are denying themselves access to sociability, which has an influence on their social standing (Carrabine & Longhurst 2002). From this perspective, the testimonies of these young people converge. From one country to another, young people who have not passed their driving test at an age when it is required are rare. Indeed, in our research, only Martine, a twenty-nine year old single student from Montreal, proves to be an exception. The reactions of Martine's acquaintances were revealing: "everybody makes fun of me in my family because I'm twenty-nine and I still don't have my driving licence." When asked about the limits to independence associated with the absence of a car, she immediately replies: "No, I don't think so. I think that what limits your independence is thinking you're not independent. That's it. It's in your head in fact." Nevertheless, although she judges owning a car to be pointless in Montreal, Martine is keen to justify herself to the interviewer by assuring him that she knows how to drive and has started the process for obtaining her driving licence – that she conforms to the norm. In fact, the prevalence of the norm of possessing a driving licence in Montreal can also be observed among the youngest people questioned who, although they lived in the central areas of Montreal, were all eager to learn to drive. This differs from the situation observed in France.

Young adults have thus been brought up in a context where obtaining a driving licence constitutes a crucial test on the path to becoming an adult. Nonetheless, while in Canada obtaining the licence remains the norm, in France a weakening of the norm can be observed among very young adults and teenagers living in urban areas (Vincent-Geslin *et al.* 2017), a decline which could have an impact on the attitudes of young adults.

What bearing does all this have on the relationship with the car? Unlike the very youngest age groups, young adults have had access to cars since they obtained their driving licence, those of their parents mostly, but sometimes an old vehicle which has been retained for their use. Young adults have therefore not only been brought up in a world where taking one's driving test was a given but where, on the other hand, their sociability in terms of automobility was more important than for the next generation. Nonetheless, young adults' relationship with the car is different from that of preceding generations. This difference is perceivable, first of all, through the fact that car usage has not necessarily increased over time, but is evolving according to individual needs. Tutuka, a 27-year-old student from Montreal, owned a vehicle until he moved to the centre of Montreal. The importance of the common transport network and his use of a bike prompted him to sell his car, which he only made use of on an infrequent basis. Romain, a 34-year-old man from Lyon, drove a lot until the age of 20 but stopped when he began his studies in Paris. Residential location thus influences automobility. Young adults for whom the car is not an integral part of their lifestyle tend to put off owning a vehicle until such time as, whether for professional or family reasons, a car becomes essential, as Martine explains: "Personally, I'm not really interested in having a car until the day comes when I'll have no other choice." The option of using a car is therefore delayed, without being discarded. It is the act of acquiring one that is put off until later, when journeys become too burdensome to be achieved by other means of transport. Denise, who is 28 years of age, lives with her partner and young child in the suburbs of Montreal. She purchased a vehicle when she could no longer reach her workplace using public transport. Mothers of families living in semi-urban areas view the use of a car as a requirement in order to be able to juggle various daily routines within their families – including their own (Sheller 2004, Van Acker 2010) – even if they find the omnipresence of the car undesirable. For example, Mary, a mother of three children from Lyon, aspires to return to the time when at least a certain amount of her regular transit could be on foot.

What concerns the researchers is the pragmatic use of cars. While taking the driving test allows individuals to become drivers, use of the car becomes strongly linked to a person's own circumstances at a later stage. Also, while Anaïs Rocci (Rocci 2007) highlights that owning a vehicle can be a barrier to change – since, according to her, once purchased, a car is rarely resold – our research indicates that incidences of reselling are common. Couples avoid owning two vehicles especially by choosing to live in areas well served by public transportation or close to one of the spouse's working location. This attitude persists after the birth of a first child in the case of those who live in the centre of urban areas. These elements reveal the change in the relation towards the car, and the fact that the effect of car socialisation does not necessarily persist.

Changing social norms

Use of the car and dual car ownership within couples remain linked to the inhabiting of residential areas. Away from the inner city, young couples tend to own two cars, due to constraints related to working life such as job location and atypical working hours. Furthermore, jobs requiring the lowest level of skills tend to be located in suburban areas and for those workers the travelling distance to work have tend to increase more than for the rest of the population (Bouzouina and *al.* 2014). Hence, people who work at the jobs that require the lowest level of skill tend to be those who use the car the most. Nonetheless, even when households both have cars and use them on a daily basis, changes in the practices relating to automobility are also to be perceived – changes that are linked to an emerging environmental awareness.

Amélie is a typical example of an individual who undertakes actions to reduce perceived conflicts, including attempts to overcome everyday limitations. When we meet her, Amélie is aged twenty-seven and lives thirty kilometres away from Lyon in the suburbs with her partner. She was born in France, in the Mâconnais, a rural region where car-driving dominates due to a lack of alternatives. Her mother was a primary-school teacher and her father, a sales representative. During the whole of her childhood, her parents drove her everywhere by car, even to school, as it was too far away for her to go alone. Like all the young people in her class, she took her driving test at the age of eighteen because “Not taking the test when you live in the country is like being an alien.” No other option could be envisaged and her parents encouraged her to take the test because it would give her more independence and mean that they were not forced to drive her everywhere.

Taking the driving test proved to be a given for all young people who spent their childhood living in either rural or suburban areas. For Amélie, the following five years were spent in Lyon and abroad, doing training as a final part of her degree. There she discovered other modes of transport, and found that cars are not always the most appropriate means. During this period, she refused to own a car but had the opportunity to use one every weekend when she went home to her mother. During her schooling, she had already been made aware of environmental issues, both at school itself and through her mother, whom she describes as very mindful of these issues, bringing up her daughters according to these principles. This translated into eco-friendly actions on a daily basis and general awareness of the environment. Her knowledge of environmental issues grew deeper during her years of study and she began to be sensitive towards the issue of transport, something which she had never paid attention to previously. Her sister opted, at that point, to live in urban areas from then on. However, when she finished her studies, Amélie herself did not wish to make such a radical choice. She and her partner liked living in the country and did not want to change this lifestyle choice. In addition, she had found her first job in Lyon, while he worked at Bourgen-Bresse, fifty kilometres away. They therefore decided to live half-way between the two, with each travelling to work in their own car. But this way of living began to get her down because of the inconvenience of having to drive in a large city during rush hours, and because it was at odds with her environmental convictions. As a result, when, a few months later, the couple

were looking for a house to buy, she laid down as a criterion that the house they chose should be near a station. At this time, she was working in the business district, which is located near to Lyon's Part-Dieu station, one of the central station. Amélie saw the opportunity to reconcile her choice of residence with her environmental concerns. However, a few months later she was made redundant and found another job on the outskirts of Lyon in a place that was difficult to access by other means than by car. On the city's car-sharing website, she then found somebody with whom she could share the journeys, and started to go by car to a meeting point she had fixed with her car-sharer, who then dropped her off close to her workplace. It was nearly always he who drove because, on the one hand, she hates driving in traffic jams and, on the other, he had an electric car and they considered it truer to their convictions to use the less polluting vehicle.

Several points emerge from Amélie's story. First of all, her awareness of the polluting nature of transport is the result of being taught about the environment and then gaining knowledge about the particular issue of transport. Secondly, her weighing up of choices is the result of her judging between various factors seen as burdensome, like the limitations posed by driving in town and her awareness of energy consumption. Amélie perceives the great difficulty in maintaining this commitment because, although she daily tries to make her convictions accord with her style of life, she admits that she does not do it during the holidays, like many people who are thoughtful about their means of travel (Barr & Prillwitz 2012; Frändberg & Vilhelmson 2011). Her situation is in no way exceptional and prompts us to regard mobility as a whole (Frändberg & Vilhelmson 2011). It is not that she is unaware of the pollution caused by her lifestyle, but she prefers to prioritise the discovery of new people and places, an aspect of life she judges to be as important as the environment. Although car use still appears to be strongly linked to place of residence (Oakil *et al.* 2016), in rural areas too there are noticeable changes (Ortar 2016), albeit more subtle than in urban centres.

Although car use still appears to be strongly linked to place of residence (Oakil *et al.* 2016), in suburban and rural areas, there are noticeable changes in these areas too (Ortar 2016), albeit more subtle than in urban centres. Living in locations other than the central areas of cities restricts a person's options in terms of the mode of transport for accessing their workplace. However, in these non-urban places, uses are shifting also. This, in turn, influences the perception of the use of the car itself, which is not associated with positive feelings. The development of home/work carpooling represents one example of these silent changes, which do not imply an abandoning of the car, but highlight, nevertheless, profound changes in our relationship with cars and, more generally, in car culture itself

Becoming a cyclist: Changing the norm

Another way of grasping the shift in the relationship with automobility is to understand how practices to which young people have not been exposed have been adopted. From this perspective, the case of cycling is an interesting one as in both cities cycling has stopped then started to become popular again. The end of cycling as a daily practice is the result of a deliberate political choice in favor of individual motorization (Carré

1998). Its return in favour is due to political choices to reduce the place of the car within the cities (Héran 2014) and in the two cities studied, the implementation of bike-sharing systems. In the two metropolitan areas, their use therefore highlights a transformation in daily practices in contexts where the conditions of cyclist traffic have improved in recent years, although not all routes are protected. Cycling therefore involves overcoming traffic restrictions. In both cases, cycling is not easy. In Lyon, this is due to the city's uneven terrain and in Montreal, on account of its weather. Thus, there is a developing urban cycling culture in both cities, which is underpinned by public policies, but not by a past history of cycling. So how is the practice of cycling acquired?

Igor comes from a middle-class background. When he was a teenager, his mother decided to settle in a rural area with her sons. He had a bike but used it only to cycle through the forest. Igor had the opportunity to drive at a very young age, something which is not a rare feature in the social life of young Canadians, especially when they live in a rural environment:

When I was young – about twelve or thirteen – and I used to go to my grandparents' house, my granddad would let me drive his car, completely on my own. I would just take the car keys and go for a spin.

At seventeen, his mother gave him a car and at eighteen, he began to travel all over Canada in his car for work. Having a sense of adventure, he sold his car to tour Europe by bicycle. Cycling was cheaper than any other means of transport. Now he has a partner and a young daughter. He has a car but prefers his bike and has a child seat on the back of the bike so that he can travel around with his daughter. Starting to use a bike as his means of transport coincided with becoming aware of the important role that consumption plays in pollution. "The most important thing is to reduce consumption – because this means that the impact will be reduced." This realisation was gradual. And the choice to travel by bike on an everyday basis was linked as much to this growing environmental awareness as to a liking for this particular mode of transport. Turning a leisure-time activity into a daily activity therefore came about as a result of the evolving nature of his core values on the one hand, and a fondness for this mode of transport on the other.

Ingrid also grew up in a rural environment with her parents. She used to go cycling with them at the weekends and enjoyed it. However, as a child and as a teen, she never used her bike to go to school. She took her driving test when aged eighteen and was given an old car. After finishing school, she worked for a year in Bordeaux. Her social integration as a cyclist occurred then under the influence of groups of peers. When she arrived in Bordeaux, she shared accommodation with several colleagues who had a common interest in bikes:

In Bordeaux I was self-employed, so I visited people in their homes by bike. I went everywhere by bike [because of] the difficulty of parking a car. So... you drive around for a quarter of an hour without finding a parking spot, whereas you can park a bike in front of the person's house. It's a time-saver ... and yes, I like it anyway. I could have bought myself a scooter, but I thought a bike was cool (...) We bought second-hand bikes at the flea market and repainted them on our patio. I really enjoyed it.

When she moved back to Lyon she continued to ride a bike even after her child was born and even though the couple own an old car, which they share. The only time they thought it convenient to use the car was in the evening: "In the evenings, we think: hey, it'll be a bit of a pain taking the underground, what with him and the pushchair, so let's go by car ... When we go to friends, for example, we have a travel cot so, yes, we take the car." While Ingrid does not claim to be an ecologist, her use of a bike forms part of an ensemble of other practices related to prudent consumption, whether it is in relation to food or other types of consumer goods. As such, Ingrid buys mainly second hand goods.

Two clear stages emerge from Ingrid and Igor's stories. The first is a primary socialisation to cycling, during which they became accustomed to this activity. As in the totality of cases observed, use of the bike does not tend to come about in adulthood without the individual in question having learnt how to cycle during their childhood. The changeover to cycling on a daily basis during adulthood is facilitated by this first stage of socialisation, but the elements that really trigger it are the fact of living together as a couple and environmental awareness, but also – and this factor is crucial – a genuine fondness for this mode of transport. In an article that touches on automotive emotions, Mimi Sheller notes that "kinaesthetic investments (such as walking, bicycling, riding a train or being in a car) orient us toward the material affordances of the world around us in particular ways and these orientations generate emotional geographies" (Sheller 2004: 230). Nathalie Ortar (Ortar 2015, 2016b) also examined the importance of sensory feelings and emotional body memories in daily routines and as a driver for choosing some social practices, factors recalled in equal measure by researchers who are focussing on the role of walking (Augoyard 1979; Gray 1999) in an individual's experience of mobility. The enduring adoption of this habit does not generally occur in the absence of these elements, which generate positive feelings. Whether it is due to a decline in automobility or an increase in the use of bikes, it is the significant role of pleasure – and therefore the senses – that accounts for this developing usage and its subsequent persistence once new practices have been adopted.

The effects of socialisation to public transport

The final case that we found to be of interest is that of people who have undergone a high degree of socialisation to public transport and who have not driven cars on a regular basis, even though they may have a driving licence. Representative of this specific scenario are Martine, in Montreal (whose story we have already discussed) and Sophie, in Lyon.

Sophie has always lived in areas that were well served by public transport, either in the inner suburbs or the city centre. She learned to drive when she was twenty but has never had her own car and has never really driven in her life as, although she had a driving licence, she had no access to a car. She and her husband began their married life by living in an apartment, but then moved to the inner suburbs at his instigation after the birth of their son. This meant that they were both further away from their workplaces. She nevertheless continued to use public transport despite the long journeys. Her husband bought her an old car, but she never used

it, even though this made her dependent on her husband for food shopping.

She has always been able to get to where she wanted to go without needing a car. It was only when she reached the age of thirty that, for the first time, she was confronted with particular circumstances where not driving meant a restriction of her daily mobility. This is something that could have led her to change her means of transport (De Vos *et al.* 2012; Handy *et al.* 2005). However, her qualms about driving proved to be too strong for her to make a decision to change, in spite of the increased length of time she spent taking transport and her dependence on her partner for her daily needs.

She remarks that:

I don't drive. I don't like driving. If it's necessary, I'll drive.
But I don't drive. I don't want to. But if it were absolutely necessary, I would drive. I really don't want to, you could say.
I admit that I'm a bit afraid of others. It's not that I don't have confidence in myself. It's that I'm afraid of other drivers.

While she complains of the length of journeys, it is the element of *pleasure* that she prioritises: the pleasure of being transported, of being able to listen to her music. Like drivers on the road, she creates a sensory environment that insulates the duration of the journey from the outside world. This phenomenon is an interesting one, as it has often been underestimated in the literature, which tends to justify the use of the car through the creation of a personalised world (Featherstone *et al.* 2004), the creation of which has been made equally possible nowadays, in different modes of transport, thanks to tools for communication (Ortar 2016b), which deeply alter experiences of public transport. These are experiences which are driving a certain number of young people who, over the course of their studies, have begun to make use of public transport, to continue afterwards, or else to alternate between different modes of transport over the course of their lives, but also over a single period, depending on the purpose of their journeys. The other interesting aspect which is highlighted by an analysis of Sophie's case is the role of socialisation, but, in this context, as a barrier to change. The satisfaction that she always got from taking public transport and her low level of socialisation with regard to cars – particularly as a driver – disincentivise the adoption of new habits.

Currently, in France, the driving test tends to be taken at a later age and is independent of car ownership (Vincent-Geslin *et al.* 2017). From this, it may be inferred that for some young people, driving will remain an occasional activity and will not be their preferred way of getting around. This, in turn, will lead them to retain their urban lifestyles.

Conclusion

Various conclusions are to be drawn from the analysis of these young people's accounts about automobility. One of the most significant is the surprising similarity of changes in the attitude toward car and soft mobility despite different economic and political contexts. Next is the fact that, even though the car remains ever-present, its use has become more pragmatic. For most of the young people met, the car is used according to the nature of the needs and not in a routine, unquestioned way. Young adults have grown accustomed to seizing opportunities

and continue to direct their choices according to such options. These shifts have been made possible by the significant effect of public policy initiatives. The changes that are afoot thus form part of a wider breadth of change. Even if this shift in the nature of car usage can be attributed to a growing awareness of the negative effects that transport has on the environment, these changes – in terms of the use of public transport, bikes, or other mobility options – have been made possible thanks to the implementing of public policies which go hand-in-hand with and encourage the ongoing changes.

While the importance of socialisation in explaining the use of the car has been highlighted in the literature, the present article allows us to show how other types of socialisation are equally important and are mobilised when it comes to shifts in social norms and practices. These other types of socialisation, which include the use of public transport, and, in equal measure, socialisation vis-à-vis the car, constitute obstacles to change. Therefore, a prolonged socialisation to public transport is, in this sense, just as much a barrier to the use of a car as socialisation to the car is to the use of public transport. In both cases, the process of adapting involves a radical modification of routines and the acquisition of new knowledge in order for the youth to learn how to deal with complex environments. In order to grasp the ongoing changes and how they are connected to changes in lifestyle, three points can be highlighted. First the importance of early socialisation in the training for later on practices as well as the importance of peers to foster or change social norms and practices. The second point is the importance of taking the whole life cycle of individuals into consideration in order to understand changes which remain dependent on one's choice of residence, one's workplace and also the everyday constraints that people face, especially in relation to having young children. However, the persistent nature of the change in the relation to automobility described is a real indicator that the changes observed are not purely incidental. Third, public policies need to be taken into account to understand to understand why some changes happen at a large scale.

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