

Clara Vadillo Quesada, France

Gender is inseparable from people's experiences in public spaces



Active mobility training expert at Académie des Mobilités Actives (Active Mobility Academy)

Clara Vadillo has a Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences and a Master's degree in Urban Studies from Sciences Po in Paris. She also obtained a Postgraduate Diploma in the National Autonomous University of Mexico on "Masculinities: Gender, power and politics." She worked for ITDP Mexico as a consultant on non-motorised and public policy and subsequently as a Road safety and public policy Manager. She recently returned to France to join the Académie des Mobilités Actives (Active Mobility Academy) as an Active Mobility Training Expert.

There is a lack of public reflection on the restricted access to active mobility experienced by women, children, LGBTQ+, the elderly, disabled people and migrant populations.

Could you briefly tell us something about your background, and your area of expertise in the field of transport with gender and diversity? What field are you currently working in?

After studying political science and urban policy, I wanted to put my knowledge into practice in Latin America, a region to which I am personally very attached. So, I moved to Mexico City where I worked for almost five years developing sustainable and inclusive mobility, linked to road safety and health issues for the NGO Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP).

In February 2021, I joined the Active Mobility Academy (ADMA) as a training expert. The Academy is funded under the Energy Savings Certificate mechanism (Certificats d'Economies

d'Énergie) by the French Ministry of Ecological Transition, and is jointly coordinated by the French [Federation of Bicycle Users](#) (FUB) and [ROZO](#). Its aim is to provide France with the expertise needed to integrate cycling and walking into all public and private policies. It comes at a pivotal time in France, when the government has set ambitious targets for active mobility, in particular that of reaching 9% of journeys by bicycle by 2024.

In your area of expertise, what have been the greatest breakthroughs with regard to increasing gender and diversity in mobility?

How has the integration of gender in the field of active mobility evolved? In your local context (Lyon and Paris) in France and in Europe?

In France, the research community has been studying active mobility from a gender perspective for over twenty years, yet it is only recently that public authorities have taken up this topic, and more attention is now being paid to how women and members of the LGBTQ+ community move and interact in and with public spaces. Unfortunately, this interest mainly exists in the larger French cities, and much remains to be done to integrate gender into cycling and walking policies across the rest of the country.

What are the factors that have affected this evolution?

After decades of promoting a system based on cars that is inefficient in all aspects, more and more stakeholders are convinced of the need to turn to other solutions, which are cleaner and fairer for all. Past public policies and the state of research show us that it is not only important to put forward technical solutions for active mobility, such as the construction of a cycle network, but also to better understand usage: who walks, who cycles, how? And above all, who doesn't, and why?

This renewed interest in active forms of transport is accompanied by a growing number of movements demanding rights to mobility and to the city. Many of these movements have been led by women. For them, access to mobility and to opportunities (professional, educational, etc.) are much more limited than for men.

One only needs to take a look at the figures for the use of active forms of transport to see that inequalities persist. As we have been reminded in a [recent report published by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies](#), 25.7% of walking trips are made by women, compared to 21.2% made by men. In cycling, these shares are 1.5% and 4%, respectively. In other words, although women walk more than men on a daily basis, they cycle less than men.

These inequalities in cycling are due to a number of factors, which have been pinpointed in the research. For example, women are more risk-averse than men, and are therefore less attracted to cycling when it is (wrongly) perceived as being

dangerous. In addition, women are under-represented in work-related trips, but over-represented in trips for tasks related to caregiving, in particular to accompany dependents. It is easier for women to walk if they have to accompany children or elderly people than to cycle.

Have there been any key initiatives (plans, laws, conferences, speeches, etc.) that have marked this evolution?

The links between gender and active mobility, highlighted by the research community and civil society, are gradually being taken into account by professionals and decision-makers. However, they are still a big unknown for the general public and do not sufficiently encourage public action, in sharp contrast to the efforts made in the area of women's safety on public transport.

In fact, in 2015, the consultation carried out by the High Council for Equality between Women and Men in the Paris region (*Haut conseil à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes en Île-de-France*) revealed that 100% of women using public transport had been victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault at least once in their lives. This was no surprise for many women, but it did have a strong impact on raising awareness as to the importance of gender in everyday life; in particular, that gender is inseparable from people's experiences in public spaces. Harassment on the street when women are walking has been widely denounced, but only addressed by government security measures.

Overall, there is a lack of public reflection on the restricted access to active mobility experienced by women, and by all groups for whom public spaces and transport were not designed: children, LGBTQ+, the elderly, disabled people, migrant populations, etc.

In your area of expertise, what have been the greatest breakthroughs with regard to increasing gender and diversity in mobility?

Have you identified any particular issues through your contacts with planning professionals?

From autumn 2021 onwards, ADMA will be training various groups in order to further develop active mobility in France. Four levels of certification will be issued depending on the degree of specialisation of the training provided and the target audience, which will range from elected officials and experts in local authorities to the general public, and will include planners, design offices, educators and researchers.

After discussions with professionals from these sectors, we have identified a significant need for training on inclusiveness, which is a particularly sensitive issue for the Academy. For us, it is about fighting the preconceived idea that active mobility is the privilege of "young dynamic executives" in metropolitan areas, who are often men, and often white. To do this, we want to highlight the specific needs of user groups who have traditionally been excluded from active mobility.

Our resources and training content will provide the keys to understanding that different groups have different mobility needs, and that the obstacles to walking and cycling are linked to particular experiences and perceptions in public spaces. For example, our first training courses, which will soon be available on the [Academy's website](#), will specifically be dealing with the place of children in the city and active mobility.

What are the needs of professionals in terms of gender inclusion in their field, other than training?

In addition to training, professionals need more human and material resources to establish

accurate diagnoses of the habits of these different groups and to evaluate the impact of active mobility projects and policies. More broadly, these resources could be used in real-life processes to co-design projects with these groups. Unfortunately, this is often seen as being too costly, rather than an essential enabler towards more efficient, more sustainable and fairer mobility.

What road maps need to be set out to increase gender and diversity in mobility at national and EU level?

While any policy must respond to local needs and issues, we would also benefit from the establishment of regional guidelines, since we already know what the main obstacles to more inclusive active mobility are. In my opinion, it is essential to address "caregiving" practices in the planning of cities and mobility. This would enable us to adapt infrastructures, services and spaces to meet the needs of children, women and, by extension, all the people who have been ignored for too long by our production and consumption-centred societies which have generated the current inequalities.

Finally, promoting equality and diversity requires diverse people from different backgrounds to work in public policymaking. An effective roadmap should emphasise the diversity of these people in recruitment and elections, so that their knowledge of the use of spaces and mobilities can be translated into systemic changes.



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