

## Marine Chevallereau, France

## Too few local authorities are proactive in including the question of gender in active mobility



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**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?**

I started working on gender and mobility issues when I was at ITDP, the transportation and development policy institute in Mexico City, where I wrote a report on gender and mobility which focused on the evaluation of policies to combat insecurity in public transport. I then participated in the Women for Climate network (launched by C40 Cities) with the city of Paris. The task of the group I was in was to understand what the obstacles to more inclusive and sustainable mobility were, and we worked on the analysis and creation of variables and new evaluation criteria for public policies, in order to take into consideration these mobility and gender challenges.

I am currently working at OpenCitiz, a consultancy

company specialised in territorial and urban strategies. I am also the President of the FéminiCités association which works on the links between gender and urban planning, and on raising awareness about mobility challenges. We also work with local authorities, and we have organised exploratory walks and public speaking training courses to encourage women to take a more active role in dialogue. I am also a lecturer in gender geography at the University of Paris 8, where we also deal with these mobility issues, but more from the perspective of "mobility of care", harassment in public transport, and the differences between low-carbon mobility and classic mobility, and the challenges at stake in each area.

**How do territorial innovation and urban development policies integrate the question of gender in the field of public space and active mobility?**

Very little. It is a topic that we are really pushing on our side and is one that has also become more and more popular over the last few years, partly because it is now compulsory for local authorities to include a gender section in public contracts. However, even if it is compulsory, very few local authorities are actually proactive about it. Some cities are very active on the topic e.g., Nantes, Lyon and Paris, of course, but it is not commonplace.

We tried to work on this with Women for Climate, but it is still very difficult because unfortunately it is not a well-known issue for many people. The fight against street harassment has gained in notoriety, which is great, but it is not the only problem on the agenda. While street harassment is very much a question of education, there is also a problem of urban equipment, and the way it is built. And it's a pity that urban planners and architects who design cities don't take a greater interest in these topics. In fact, we are well aware that the way we design spaces, and the way a metro, bus or bicycle lane are built will have an impact on our feelings of insecurity. However, this is unfortunately ignored on many occasions.

During a small study I conducted with students from the University of Paris 8 a few years ago, I followed them on their daily journeys home from university and I could see that, even in the middle of the day, there were major concerns about crossing specific pedestrian tunnels/underpasses. Some students preferred to take long detours rather than go through certain tunnels that made them anxious or they considered too dark or deserted, which brought up the issue of the five senses: seeing, being seen, hearing, etc., which has a huge impact.

### **What factors have influenced the evolution of gender mainstreaming in public space and mobility?**

From the point of view of elected representatives and local communities, the first factor is ecological. Often, the elected representatives we meet who are not necessarily sensitive to the topic of gender tackle it from the ecological side: "In the context of the ecological transition, we

need more people to take public transport, therefore we need to make it safer".

There has also been increased interest from the media over street harassment, especially thanks to years of activism by associations that have made it a public concern.

In schools, more and more work has been done on how we share public space from a very young age, and I can see these questions of sharing space and equality clearly in the courses I give to students who are quite young and much more aware than I was at the time. In the end, sharing space in the school playground influences the sharing of public and private spaces in young people's lives.

Project calls put out by the State, e.g., the future investment programmes (PIA), "Action cœur de ville", "Petites villes de demain" etc. have contributed to this mainstreaming, as mobility is often a big topic in these programmes. For instance, in the context of work carried out in Villiers-le-Bel (Parisian region), the question of mobility and gender came up throughout these programmes, as did housing, highlighting the fact that there is a tangible link between egalitarian housing, the way in which housing is built, and public space. Indeed, the way we behave in a private space will necessarily influence our behaviour in the public space and vice versa. And I find that reconnecting the two is very interesting because it also links up with the ecological vision, giving a general overview of the urban fabric and the way we live in cities.

### **Based on your experience, what are the biggest challenges that need to be addressed with a view to increasing gender and diversity in mobility?**

I think that the major challenge is consultation, and this is the big thing missing in mobility policies. In urban policies, this is starting to move forward a little, as I said, because there are quite a few programmes and efforts being made. But in mobility policies, it's still something that is decided by a few design offices and transport operators. Citizens also need to be involved in

decisions. Of course, I know how difficult it is, with local authorities having less and less money available, due to fewer state subsidies.

It also depends on the capacity of some design offices and operators to self-reflect. But this equilibrium is very difficult to find because there are huge financial stakes involved for the big operators. The biggest challenge is real consultation, i.e. managing to target people properly. Because in any case, when there is no consultation, there is a lack of transport services afterwards.

### How would you compare the situation of gender in mobility between Mexico City and Paris? What conclusions would you draw?

It is a totally different scenario because Mexico City has separate, women-only passenger cars in trains. This was originally a short-term solution supposed to bring equality, but it didn't work. There are also some specific women-only buses and taxis. In Mexico City, it is an issue that has been integrated and they have decided to deal with it in this way, so the bottom line is already very different from Paris. Moreover, Mexico City is much bigger than Paris, the distances are much greater, there is more room for cars, and there is much more informal transport. There are some things specifically for women, but the levels of insecurity are still very high.

The problem with separate-gender transport is that it is a great short-term solution for women's safety, but the idea is to find a long-term solution and we are not there yet. And once again, if informal buses are removed, this takes away means of transport for women. This is a big issue, and it's very complex to find a balance between the need for safety and security, which is obvious, and the need for service, which is currently filled partly by small informal buses.

Paris has a much stronger, more assertive policy of ecological transition. Gender-wise, the RATP has implemented many measures to address insecurity in public transport and they have trained agents to monitor it. However, although they have put some things in place, such as emergency numbers to combat harassment, most users have no idea they exist.

It is just two ways of dealing with things but, in both cases, there are still enormous levels of insecurity which lead to highly costly avoidance strategies.

**Please take note that my opinion is my own and it does not reflect or engage FeminiCités or OpenCitz officially in any form.**



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