

Marion Lagadic, France

Engaging with intersectional identities is necessary to understand the wide variety of women's mobility experiences



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Marion Lagadic holds a Master's degree in Urban Policy from Sciences Po in Paris and an MSc degree in Regional and Urban Planning Studies from the London School of Economics. She is currently a PhD student at the University of Oxford working on the link between gender and cycling, using the city of Tokyo as a case study. She is the scientific director of 6t, a Paris-based social sciences research company specialised in mobility.

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 am the Scientific Director of 6t, a social sciences research company specialised in mobility and transport. At 6t, I have worked extensively on shared mobility, and shared micro-mobility in particular, (scooters, bicycles etc.) with frequent issues of inclusiveness.

As part of my PhD at Oxford, I study the role that cycling plays in gendered lives and the link between gender inequalities and cycling in Tokyo. Past research on women's cycling practices, based on Western case studies, suggested that gender equality would be conducive to women cycling. While this appeared to be the case in Europe, this result does not hold in Japan. Japan is still marked by strong gender inequalities, and household tasks (housework, family care) are taken on almost exclusively by women. Yet, a majority of cyclists are women.

What major conclusions would you draw from your study on the link between cycling and gender in the context of Tokyo? Why is there such a difference between Japan and France in terms of women's cycling?

The study is still ongoing, there are preliminary results though these could change. In the past, research has tended to adopt an infrastructure-based approach in order to find quick operational solutions to make mobility more sustainable and more inclusive. There has been a lot of research based on European countries where women cycle less (e.g., France, UK) and countries where women cycle more (e.g., Netherlands, Denmark). This research has found that women are more risk averse and that providing good infrastructure would lead to an increased number of women cycling. While this reasoning is not wrong since it has been proven in many contexts, it is too euro-centric: conclusions from European case studies cannot be used to draw universal conclusions.

Through my work on the city of Tokyo, I am exploring a cycling practice that is very much driven by women, since 57% of cyclists are female. In Tokyo, cycling is mostly used in relation to household chores, shopping, administration tasks, children, with these representing up to 60% of cycling trips (excluding return-home trips), all in a context where there are few cycle lanes and paths. In Tokyo, there are 70 km of recommended cycling routes compared to around 1,000 km in Paris, even though Tokyo is much larger than Paris. Yet, the urban context is particular, with a lot of narrow streets where cars drive slowly, and many alleys where cars can't even get in. This is perhaps a vernacular form of cycling infrastructure that exists without a proactive public will to promote cycling. My research endeavours to study this specific women-led cycling practice in the context of Japanese society. In Japan, women spend on average about 23 hours per week on household and care tasks compared to five hours for men (and 43 hours compared to eight hours for couples with children). The sharing of these activities is therefore based on a very gendered model.

Compared to past research based on European cases, these results suggest that while infrastructure plays a key role, the complexities of women's modal choice cannot be reduced to the absence or presence of cycling lanes. This gendered cycling practice that I am studying in Tokyo takes place in a particular urban context, where public transport is very efficient within the city, where cycling has been considered very natural since the post-war period, and where Japanese bicycle manufacturers have long been selling bicycles especially designed for mothers with children, called the Mamachari.

The main conclusion is that the relation between gender equality and women's cycling practices is complex and can only be understood by looking at the wider cultural, economic, political context in which women make decisions regarding their daily mobilities. This complex relation is overlooked when the focus is exclusively on infrastructure.

Another important finding while analysing public policies and national/municipal cycling promotion strategies in Japan, is that there are many mentions of work-home commutes and the need to facilitate cycling to work, highlighting the links to the economy. However, women, or the link between cycling and care are never mentioned in these documents. Therefore, public policies are conceived based on imagining the cyclist as an active man rather than a woman who may be working part-time or a full-time mother. The specificity of care- and housework-related cycling trips, mostly taken on by women, is not tackled by policymakers. This research also highlights the importance for communities and governments to think critically about their images of cyclists, and how that influences their decisions because I don't think it was a conscious choice not to respond to that practice, it is rather the result of a policy culture that is very much focused on the link between mobility and economic dynamism, hence the focus on commuting trips.

As part of your work with 6t, you are studying the impacts of shared mobility services on urban transport ecosystems. How would you say shared mobility services integrate the gender dimension in their activities?

I believe that today, many operators are aware of the fact that women are poorly represented among their users. The starting point when we think about cycling is that the basic user profile (in Europe and the US) is an upper class, highly educated, relatively young man. This is exacerbated when we look at shared mobility: users of free-floating bicycles or scooters are even more likely to be men, even younger and even more highly educated. There is a selection bias, and the fact that shared mobility services tend to be quite expensive may contribute to this lack of inclusiveness. Many operators are taking up these issues. At 6t, we have carried out a study for the scooter operator Voi on the inclusiveness of shared micro-mobility services. These services must also be placed in the complex context of gendered life, meaning that

women do not have the same constraints as men in their daily lives; they tend to have fewer resources in terms of time and money, and this may also impact on their willingness to try new services as their routines are quite constrained.

However, steps forward are being made. For example, Voi joined the association Femmes en mouvement in France and Women in Transport in the UK. They are trying to interact with professional women who could give them concrete leads beyond adapting their communication strategy. Indeed, as long as inequalities between men and women exist and as long as women face so many constraints on their available resources for mobility, these services will remain less accessible to women than to men. Addressing this specific issue is very difficult.

What avenues of improvement for integrating gender into mobility could be drawn from this study for the French or Ile-de-France context?

I think that an important first step is to better understand women's mobility and the constraints they face. Nowadays, when designing a new mobility policy, the starting point will generally be to look at household travel surveys to try to collect data on the trends that need to be addressed. This data tends to be presented as a neutral truth, whereas data is never neutral. It is always created with predefined categories, according to a certain vision of the world, whether that person is aware of it or not. When studying mobility practices, often the category of 'constrained trips' will be put forward. Constrained trips include home-work trips, whilst journeys related to grocery shopping or childcare, are not considered to be constrained, though they clearly are. They are constrained due to women's socially enforced care responsibilities, which are as binding as a job contract, if not more so. As a consequence, the constraints faced by women tend to be overlooked, especially when work-related trips are the opposite of what are defined as leisure trips. This is an argument that has been made by the Spanish researcher Inés Sánchez de Madariaga, among others. I think that

we really need to think collectively to truly understand the constraints that women face and have the right data to address them.

Intersectional approaches are also very important because being a woman is one thing; but being a woman of colour or a woman with a low income is not something totally different. And the experience of a woman of colour is not equivalent to that of a white woman, combined with that of a man of colour, for instance. Engaging with these intersectional identities is necessary to understand the wide variety of women's mobility experiences. The most important step is to accept the complexity of this issue, and not try to simplify it in order to find solutions that perhaps fit into a pre-existing mobility plan. Going back to women's mobility practices, Rachel Aldred has shown that in the UK, when the cycling modal share increased, after investment in infrastructure for instance, the profiles of cyclists did not necessarily diversify. The new cyclists tend to have the same profile as before, i.e. men with a high social status. Even if it is an uncomfortable truth, there is no single solution to all mobility constraints, because mobility sits at the core of everyday lives that are classed and gendered.

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

The first important step that I see is to review the way we produce basic data used for decision-making in order to better take into account the link between gender and mobility practices. I think women's mobility practices should be studied in the context of the society in which they live. For instance, inequalities in the labour market and conservative welfare state provisions will have an impact on women's daily lives and, in turn, on mobility practices. Women's mobility practices can only be understood in light of these structural gender inequalities.

Finally, last but not least is the need to increase female representation among experts, decision-makers, companies that offer these services, and operators so that their experience and their voices are heard and taken into account.



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