Teenage mobility: a socialised and socialising practice

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The comings and goings of teenagers, while a frequent source of tension in the parent–child relationship, are a crucial experience in the construction of social identities. For this age group, mobility is not just a practice that is socially determined – by social background, residential environment and schooling – but also a specific experience that durably shapes their relationships with the spaces and the social world they encounter.

Adolescence is a period of searching and experimentation during which individuals seek to discover new horizons and to partially free themselves from the frameworks of behaviour passed on by family and school (Zaffran 2010). Day-to-day mobility practices, that is to say relatively regular journeys within the settlement of residence, are one of the principal mediums for this experimentation. In the course of these journeys, teenagers develop relations of sociability among peers that are beyond the control of the adults who usually supervise their mobility. In addition, teenagers come into contact with the rules of the public domain, as they are no longer interacting with familiar individuals but with strangers (Breviglieri 2007). Day-to-day mobility thus occupies a fundamental role in the "socialisation" of teenagers, understood as a process of lasting incorporation of ways of behaving, which adapt and evolve continually according to the contexts and situations experienced by the individual (Darmon 2010). However, though mobility helps change the way teenagers act, it is itself a practice that is based on pre-formed habits, which are the product of a socialisation of mobility: using public transport, frequenting urban public spaces, interacting with strangers, etc., are not innate skills; they are learnt. Mobility is thus both a structured disposition and a practice that structures adolescence.

In order to better understand this dynamic between mobility and socialisation, we shall make use of a number of field-based surveys conducted in the Paris region: first, a monograph in a rural area on the edge of the region, marked by low densities, dynamic demographic trends and a still-important farming sector (Devaux 2012); second, the statistical analysis of the 2001/02 *Enquête Globale Transports* (comprehensive household travel survey)[1] in the Paris region; and third, an interview-based study conducted among working- and middle-class teenagers from *zones urbaines sensibles* (sensitive urban zones[2]) or ZUSs (Oppenchaim 2011a). Although these field studies are, in theory, dissimilar, their comparison allows us to assess the influence of research results while paying greater attention to the role played by space in the socialisation of individuals (Grafmeyer and Authier 2008).

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[1] This survey, conducted under the aegis of the former *direction régionale de l'Équipement* (regional directorate of the public works ministry) for the Paris region, recorded all weekday journeys made by 23,657 inhabitants of the Paris region, including 2,309 young people aged 11 to 18 who were in full-time education or apprenticeships, and who did not yet have a driving licence. Of these young people, 810 were also surveyed regarding their weekend journeys.

[2] *Zones urbaines sensibles* (sensitive urban zones) are underprivileged areas that have been designated as high-priority targets for public policy measures such as urban renewal.

A socialisation into mobility

The day-to-day mobility of teenagers is strongly determined by the dispositions that they have incorporated into their domestic, residential and educational sphere. These dispositions are operative in three domains: relationships with regard to different modes of transport, to urban anonymity, and to the co-presence of strangers (Oppenchaim 2011b).

These dispositions differ first and foremost according to the domestic environment in which the teenagers have grown up. Economic capital, access to a vehicle and the availability (in terms of time) of parents have a strong influence, for example, on the number of non-school-related journeys made with parents during childhood. The result is that teenagers from ZUSs are less likely to have made journeys (other than to and from school) when they were younger with their parents than those from non-ZUS areas of the Paris region. These journeys play a key role in forging specific relationships with mobility: visits to the city centre help children become familiarised with the concept of urban anonymity, while frequent journeys by car, on the other hand, may lead to a certain apprehension with regard to public transport. More generally, the representations and practices of mobility of older members of the family have a strong influence on the way in which teenagers learn to get around, and in particular on their level of autonomy. There is, for example, a differentiated socialisation of children regarding mobility according to gender (Vandermissen 2008), as well as according to the age of their siblings: the first journeys teenagers make without their parents are very often initiated by slightly older brothers and sisters. The way teenagers learn mobility practices also depends upon parents' attitudes to children's utilisation and appropriation of public spaces (Valentine and McKendrick 1997; Rivière 2012) and on the way the family unit – more or less open to the outside world – functions (Kaufmann and Widmer 2005), as well as on parents' residential trajectories and own experiences of mobility (Goyon 2009). So, for example, teenagers in ZUSs and rural areas whose parents previously lived in the urban core are more autonomous in their urban mobility and have a more positive view of the city and public transport modes. This can be explained both by a process of transmission of parental representations and frequent journeys made with parents into the city centre during childhood.

Teenagers' dispositions regarding mobility are also strongly determined by the residential context(s) they have experienced. These dispositions are structured mainly in the area of residence, whether due to the influence of peers – who play an increasingly important role in the socialisation of young teenagers, be it in ZUSs (Lepoutre 2001), rural areas (Renahy 2005) or other areas (Galland, 2010; Pasquier 2005) – or whether due to a residential context that is more or less favourable to children's autonomy in terms of mobility (Depeau 2008) or to the use of a particular mode of transport. Teenagers from ZUSs in the Paris region, who are more likely than other teenagers in the region to live in areas well served by public transport but who are aware that they live in segregated neighbourhoods, grow up in contexts radically different from those of teenagers in rural areas located far from major public transport infrastructures. While teenagers from ZUSs start to use public transport without their parents at an earlier age (even though some report feeling stigmatised by other citizens when travelling), those who live in rural areas develop a strong local focus in their mobility, based essentially around walking and the use of motorised two-wheelers. Nevertheless, though the current place of residence strongly influences dispositions with regard to mobility, these dispositions also depend on teenagers' residential trajectories. Those who have experienced different residential settings (resulting from house moves, migration, dual residence due to divorce, or long holiday periods spent with a family member) have more extensive mobility practices and are less apprehensive of the challenge of urban anonymity, which is reflected in their greater propensity for travel in urban public spaces or even for using public transport, whether they live in a ZUS or in a rural area.

Finally, we should not forget the influence of the academic sphere on the mobility of young people. Some teenagers, especially those whose parents strictly supervise their mobility, only experience public transport and urban anonymity during school outings. More generally, journeys to

and from school help modify dispositions regarding mobility – in this case, a capacity to use certain modes of transport, a taste for self-mobility (when these trips are made without the presence of adults) and an appetite for mobility outside the area of residence (when school is located far from the parental home). Among teenagers from ZUSs, for instance, there is a significant difference between pupils at vocational high schools, who are most likely to attend schools located more than half an hour from home by public transport but which are relatively homogeneous socially, and pupils on general and technical high-school programmes, who are mostly educated in their town of residence in more mixed schools. The role of travel between home and school cannot, however, be analysed without taking into consideration teenagers' domestic and residential environments. The successive moves up to junior high school (*collège*, at age 11) and high school (*lycée*, at age 15) are much more important steps in the mobility trajectories of teenagers in rural areas than of those in ZUSs, as rural pupils often have to "go into town" for their secondary education. Similarly, for a given home-to-school distance, some parents of teenagers in rural areas will favour certain modes of transport over others (e.g. the school bus or the family car) according to their educational strategies and their relationship to mobility.

Mobility: a socialising experience

Although mobility is a socialised practice, based on habits forged in the domestic, residential and school environments, it is itself a specific experience in teenage socialisation. At this age, mobility plays an important role in individuals' learning of behaviours and ways of being, gradually reshaping the dispositions acquired during primary socialisation. These socialising effects of mobility are particularly operative during free time, that is to say periods that are free of the constraints of the traditional structures of socialisation that are family and school (Zaffran 2010). They are especially important in the case of self-mobility, where teenagers travel without adult accompaniment and freely determine the conditions of their journeys (Massot and Zaffran 2007).

First of all, mobility affects teenagers' ways of being and behaving within their peer group, which play an increasingly important role in teenage socialisation (Pasquier 2005). At this age, peers become more and more involved in mobility practices: they are one of the key reasons for mobility ("to go a friend's house", "to meet up with friends") but, above all, they become preferred partners in self-mobility situations. These group-based mobility practices constitute sequences of homolalic socialisation,[3] during which teenagers' dispositions are transformed in two respects (Mead 2006): first, mobility encourages the internalisation of the peer group's norms, whether general norms of teen culture or norms specific to the group frequented. Secondly, however, it also plays a role in the individualisation of teenagers: when travelling with peers, they learn to find their own place within this reference group.

Furthermore, the movements of teenagers, alone or in groups, gradually reshapes their dispositions vis-à-vis mobility, particularly those acquired in the domestic sphere. At this age, experiences in mobility have lasting effects on the future practices of teenagers. They sometimes help modify the dispositions of teenagers regarding transport modes. We could cite, among other examples, the case of a girl from a ZUS whose fear of the metro gradually diminished as a result of occasional trips with her best friend, who was more familiar with this mode of transport. These experiences also influence the spatial amplitude of future mobility, in particular preferences for travel within or outside one's area of residence. For some rural teenagers, the first experiences of urban mobility among peers, the starting point of which is often the town in which they are schooled, are thus an integral part of their "urban experience" (Kokoreff 1994), later leading to a ritualisation of "trips into town".

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[3]   The term "homolalia" (and its adjective "homolalic") signifies frequenting interlocutors who resemble oneself; here, it refers to the tendency for teenagers to socialise with people close to their own age, and especially of the same sex. This notion was developed in particular by François Héran (1987) and Caroline Moulin (2005).

Finally, mobility allows teenagers to discover the public domain, when it gives rise to interactions that take place under the gaze of an incidental audience and which are therefore subject to specific rules. In the course of their travels, teenagers gradually become familiar with these rules, and they mutually adapt their behaviours to those of other citizens so as to eventually find their place within the public domain. Listening to music on mobile phones on public transport, for example, is appropriate to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the circumstances at the time. Although travelling alone and travelling with peers are very much different things during adolescence, this does not mean that solitary mobility practices cannot be socialising experiences, as they are also an opportunity to confront the public domain. However, the nature of this confrontation appears to be differentiated according to teenagers' areas of residence. In ZUSs, it typically leads teens to learn how to manage the co-presence of citizens from other social and residential backgrounds, especially on public transport. By contrast, in rural areas, because of the lack of public transport, it will typically give rise to a personalised interaction and a confrontation with residential inter-knowledge, which has a structuring effect in these territories (Mischi and Renahy 2008). There are consequently fewer teenagers in rural areas than in ZUSs who develop a taste for and knowledge of the codes that are specific to each residential environment and which are necessary to make the transition with ease between one's area of residence and other types of territory.

In most cases, these mobility sequences result in a mutual agreement between participants: the community of meanings is therefore confirmed and reaffirmed. But for some teenagers, a conflict may result from these interactions, particularly when they feel that other people consider their presence in the public space to be problematic. For some teenagers from ZUSs, their presence on public transport can lead to tense situations when other users adopt specific behaviours towards them (disapproving looks, avoidance, etc.) or bluntly make it clear that their behaviour (listening to music, recreational activities, etc.) is not appreciated. Similarly, in rural areas, it would appear that numerous clashes occur between youths who "hang out" in residential public spaces and local residents; here, more violent – and often verbal – signs of hostility are exhibited by the adults. This conflict has different consequences depending on the area of residence. For some teenagers from ZUSs, these sequences of interaction with strangers will contribute to the formation of a triple stigma (geographical, ethnic and social), which will have lasting effects on their urban mobility and contribute to a limitation of their horizons to their neighbourhood of residence. In rural areas, these interactions are extensively structured by local family and social relationships, and will instead help to construct or reaffirm a marginalised position within the local social space.

Conclusion

The links between mobility and socialisation in adolescence are numerous and highly dynamic. This dynamism is particularly marked at the residential level. Dispositions with regard to mobility are above all keenly structured by teenagers' residential context and geographical location, as well as by the relationship maintained with their area of residence, the uses that they make of this area, and the more or less local nature of their network of friends and family. But, conversely, teenagers' mobility experiences alter the way they behave and, in particular, their residential roots: they can, for example, lead to a restriction of horizons to the area of residence or, on the contrary, to an increasingly intermittent presence within this space. Linking mobility and socialisation thus avoids the pitfalls not just of analyses of day-to-day mobility that fail to take account of the residential stability of individuals, but also of an approach focused exclusively on practices relating to residential space, excluding significant aspects of the way individuals inhabit this space and the associated modifications of their behaviour.

Lastly, a complementary line of enquiry might be to examine the socialisation exerted not by day-to-day mobility, but by occasional, more exceptional mobility. Are the "long-distance" mobilities of teenagers during the school holidays influenced by their dispositions with regard to day-to-day

mobility? And, conversely, do these mobilities also help to change the way teenagers from ZUSs and rural areas behave, and in particular the way they relate to the place they live?

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