

# Mobility capital and empowerment: impacts of bicycle lessons for migrants in cities of Western Switzerland

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This paper explores the effects of bicycle lessons given by a non-governmental association in 6 cities of Western Switzerland. It studies the impacts of such lessons on the participant's motility (as defined by Kaufmann, 2004 – that is mobility capital), (im)mobility and empowerment. The functioning and target audience of these lessons vary depending on the cities, but it is surprising to notice that even when open to all adults, they tend to attract mostly immigrant women. The reason for this is not clear, as some structural explanation– for instance cultural - are often invoked, but are not sufficient to explain fully this trend. Taking into account this peculiarity, this paper examines how and to what extent, the lessons contribute to the empowerment process of these women, based on, but going beyond, gaining motility. The paper builds on the three dimensions of empowerment as enumerated by Bacqué and Biewener (2013): individual, collective and social/political. These three dimensions also reflect the multi-scalar aspects of mobility's social stakes. Arguments are drawn on an on going fieldwork based on qualitative mixed-methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews with both participants and former participants of these lessons.

In Swiss' cities, as in many cities of the so-called “developed” world, differential access to mobility remains an important factor of socio-spatial inequality and exclusion. These bicycle lessons aim at increasing participants' mobility capital, and as a consequence are likely to enhance one's capacity to take part in various social activities hence to be socially included. However, these effects are neither immediate nor guaranteed. Indeed, it was found that for many participants, cycling is not seen as a transportation mode but mostly as leisure. For those who do see cycling as a transportation mode, the possibility for actual use depends on the level reached and feeling of self-confidence by the participants, as well as on the spatial context and access to a bicycle. As a consequence, the first part of this paper explores to what extent the bicycle lessons enhance mobility (capital) in these different cases and how this reflects on the empowerment parameters.

Secondly, the paper focuses on the broader effects of mobility in shaping places, land use, as well as ways of living, and the quality and condition of social interactions, that is, at a collective and social/political level. In cities that are still dominated by the automobile as a system, it can be argued that the use of bicycle, defined as a convivial tool by Ivan Illitch (1973), conveys a potential for change. This research tries to bring in elements to study this potential, in the particular case of novice cyclists. The data gathered do not suggest a strong importance of the convivial aspect of bicycle as only one respondent clearly valued this characteristic although several others invoked similar considerations, for instance when talking about the difference between driving and cycling. However, several interviewed reported having changed their behavior toward cyclists when driving a car and experienced an increased consciousness and/or feeling of respect for bicycle users. This is in line with the policy of the non-governmental association giving these lessons, as it's goal is to defend the interest of cyclists through awareness campaigns, lobbying, affordable access to bicycles etc.

In conclusion, this research shows that the impact of these bicycle lessons can vary strongly from one participant to another. On one hand, the gain of motility seems unequivocal but its level fluctuates considerably depending on the acquired competences and feeling of confidence as well as on the level of appropriation. On the other hand, the process of empowerment can take different forms and therefore lead to question the normative aspect of empowerment measurement.

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