

POLITICAL DESIGNS

BY SYLVIE LANDRIÈVE, CHRISTOPHE GAY AND MARC PEARCE

HIGH MOBILITY: A SOCIETAL PHENOMENON

In the past several decades, the distance between the home and workplace has continued to grow. With increases in transport speeds, one can work a hundred miles from home without having to relocate. We immediately think of this lifestyle of so-called “reversible” mobility as being the prerogative of business people, corporate executives, researchers and high-powered lawyers, like George Clooney’s character in *In the Air*. Yet, we forget that those most concerned by high mobility are long-distance transport drivers. What has changed, however, is that many other service sectors - including sales, teaching and administration - are now affected as well. In fact, today, half of working households in France include a highly mobile person at one time or another.



Whether the job involves a two-hour daily commute, making frequent business trips or “overnighting”, high mobility has become a societal phenomenon. In fact, we could say that this lifestyle that obliges so many to travel for work, while attempting to stay locally ‘rooted’, is emblematic of modern life. But what do highly mobile people really think?

A European research project helped us define them at the social level, to find out what they think, feel and want, and to better understand their practices, experiences and desires – in other words, to understand their way of life. In keeping with this research

conducted in Germany, Spain, France and Switzerland in 2007 and again in 2011, the Mobile Lives Forum aims to propose tools for developing and implementing veritable *mobility* policies, not just transport policies. Its goal is to reach all those affected by work-related mobility. This includes collective entities such as businesses and government administrations with highly mobile employees,

decision makers and services responsible for economic development, transport, family and gender equality. However, it also includes individuals who, mobile or not, will also find interest in the Forum's research and findings.

HIGH MOBILITY: A CHALLENGING CAREER PHASE

The European survey shows that people increasingly consider becoming highly mobile at some point in their careers – sometimes even at several different points, but for short periods. Nowadays it is difficult to categorically avoid or refuse this way of life. In general, however, people tend not to do it for long, except in the case of mobile occupations (pilot, chauffeur, driver or delivery person) or business reps, whose mobility is likewise part and parcel of their business. People become highly mobile essentially for practical reasons, i.e. in the hopes of getting a promotion or during hard times that call for a lifestyle change (unemployment, separation, etc.), often resigning themselves to it, more out of necessity than for pleasure. This clearly challenges the image of mobility as freedom.



Increasingly, highly mobile people describe their lifestyle as exhausting, arduous, trying and unenriching (except perhaps financially). Whether they know it or not, they are jeopardising the cohesion of their family unit, as well as that of their network of friends, and impeding their involvement in local life.

Research has already pinpointed certain effects of highly mobile lifestyles on health (fatigue), family (risk of separation) and social life (less socializing), which makes studying its other potential effects all the more interesting (the social cost of education at a distance, children's schooling, stress, etc.). There is a pressing need to increase social awareness about highly mobile lifestyles - not only among employers and politicians but also among workers themselves, and perhaps in society as a whole. In order to reduce this arduousness, we must imagine how to accompany the phenomenon, facilitate the lives of highly mobile people and perhaps even promote the development of less trying, more sustainable alternative lifestyles.

IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING HIGHLY MOBILE PEOPLE

This was our main finding from analysing highly mobile people's perception of their lifestyles.

Our results stress the importance for companies with highly mobile employees to revisit their human resource policies. While we are well aware of the existence of inherently mobile occupations, i.e. lorry drivers, train drivers, pilots, etc., new mobile occupations must also be identified.

DEVELOPING THE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR HIGH MOBILITY

A policy that aims for employee well-being must first identify the positions that involve high mobility and assign them to those best suited for them, namely those without children or with adult-aged children. The European study also shows that jobseekers, often desperate to find a job at any cost, are more willing to be highly mobile than other people. In Spain, many job seekers and unstably