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**RESEARCH**

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## Being a bicycle delivery rider: passion or exploitation?

Ongoing research

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In recent years, takeaway delivery has exploded, in a context where consumer practices are changing, last-mile logistics are being reorganized and environmental issues are growing. Many freelance delivery riders have jumped on the bandwagon, employed by large companies such as Deliveroo, Uber Eats or Stuart. The Mobile Lives Forum wanted to understand who these delivery riders are and what their experience is in this mobile business, divided between the attractiveness of an outdoor activity with a lot of autonomy and flexibility, and the pressure of employers to meet efficiency requirements.

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### Research participants

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### The problem

The research is being conducted by a group of students in the Master's in Urban Planning and Development at the University of Paris I, under the direction of Juliette Maulat. They look at delivery riders working for bicycle delivery companies providing meals to

individual customers, including delivery riders working in cooperatives that formed in response to large delivery companies.

Today, 40% of the French workforce travels daily or almost daily as part of their job (excluding home/work commutes). Workplace **mobility**, the living conditions of mobile workers and their mobility-related carbon footprint are not sufficiently understood, even though their magnitude requires taking them into account when thinking about the transition to more sustainable and desirable lifestyles. The study of bicycle delivery riders is therefore perfectly in line with this issue.

Home delivery has grown significantly, in connection with changing lifestyles and consumer practices. This development raises questions of urban logistics. While we know that the last mile is the most costly from a financial and environmental standpoint and causes significant congestion problems, bicycle delivery is seen as a fast, inexpensive, convenient and environmentally friendly means for delivery companies to respond more efficiently to consumer demands. However, the organization of this activity is largely structured by companies (Deliveroo, Uber Eats, etc.) that employ freelance delivery riders and who, in their quest for profitability, impose on them a number of constraints, such as a low pay and the pressure to be as fast and efficient as possible - which can lead them to put their own safety at risk.

In thinking about a more socially fair and ecologically sustainable society, are there conditions in which this activity could meet the aspirations of consumers and ensure fluid and environmentally friendly logistics all the while providing these delivery riders with good working conditions and ensuring their safety and that of all those they come into contact with (pedestrians, other cyclists, etc.)?

This problem contains a series of questions:

Who are the bike delivery riders? How did they come to this job (how much choice and necessity)? What does this activity mean to them (secondary job, full-time or part-time work)?

How do they experience their mobility in the course of their work? What constraints and difficulties do they have to deal with? What is the impact of their intense professional mobility on their personal lives and on their mobility practices? By acquiring a variety of skills, can mobility be a springboard for them to other activities?

How can the working conditions of delivery riders be improved? What urban developments should be put in place, and what changes in status, working conditions and equipment for delivery riders could make this activity socially acceptable and ensure its sustainability in the landscape of urban logistics?

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## Hypotheses

We hypothesize that cycling delivery activities can be a constrained choice made by poor people who have a limited range of professional opportunities, but that it also appears to be a desirable activity for people seeking autonomy, independence, flexibility and the enjoyment of cycling and working outdoors.

It is assumed, however, that in practice, these choices result in difficult working conditions, in particular due to the intense mobility imposed by companies and the consequences suffered by the delivery riders: stress, fatigue, danger, exposure to pollution, risk of bicycle theft, financial constraints caused by the need to buy and maintain equipment, difficulties in maintaining a balanced social and family life due to complicated schedules and the tiring work, etc. All for a paltry income and a freelance status that has few benefits (no paid leave and the risk of sudden unemployment...).

However, we assume that the experience of delivery riders varies according to different factors that can allow for a more pleasant experience of their mobility: which companies they work for, their relationship to cycling (socialization, sporting abilities, attachment to cycling), the urban environment in which they work, whether this job is their main source of income or an additional one, etc.

## Methodology

Students will begin with a literature review to reposition the profession of delivery rider in the evolution of urban logistics and consumer practices as well as in the world of work and the uberization of society. They will also look at the work on cycling and urban developments that can facilitate the practice of cycling.

Next, the group will conduct semi-structured interviews with current and former delivery riders to better understand who they are, what the different aspects of their work are, what their experience of their professional mobility is and how this activity fits into their personal and professional development. This qualitative survey will be accompanied by observations in the public space to understand the mobility and immobility of delivery riders.

Results are expected in the spring of 2021.

### Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that

make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

More

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Keywords : [cycling](#), [Work](#), [lifestyle](#), [hypermobility](#), [uberisation](#)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobility-450>

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/cycling>

<sup>4</sup> <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/work>

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/lifestyle>

<sup>6</sup> <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/hypermobility>

<sup>7</sup> <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/uberisation>