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Safe, sustainable... but depoliticized and uneven – A critical view of urban transport policies in France

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Abstract

This article offers a critical view of the contemporary urban policies undertaken in France in the name of safe, sustainable urban transport strategies. It seeks to show how a spatially and socially selective ordering is under way in French transport planning and policies by presenting an overview of research and empirical results dealing with the narratives and the implementation of these policies.

Firstly, urban transport policies were analysed as narratives. Stressing users' individual responsibility and their capacity to adopt economically rational behaviours, and conveying moral injunctions for them to adopt the 'right', safe, healthy, sustainable mobility behaviours, a depoliticized framing of issues characterizes these public policies. Referring to theoretical frameworks related to neoliberalisation as a rationality, our hypothesis is that a neoliberal rationality feeds these policies by ignoring a certain number of macrosocial determinants. Moreover, the use of morality works as a powerful democratic anaesthetic that dissolves any objection.

Secondly, we studied how these policies, legitimated by 'noble causes' and depoliticized, influence the organization of traffic in the city, and to what extent they lead to a selective and uneven treatment of urban spaces. While sustainable mobility is frequently presented as a major objective in the field of urban planning for transport and travel, contemporary policies do not seek to reduce polluting modes of travel overall. They rather seek to direct them onto bypass road infrastructures to reduce their negative impacts on the city's main sites. 'Sustainable' policies oppose the car only in certain spaces and for certain uses. With reference to theoretical frameworks related to the entrepreneurial mutation of urban policies, our interpretation is that these policies are part of urban marketing strategies of cities engaged in inter-urban competition processes. These policies lead to an increase in the value and attractiveness of strategic areas of the city, and tend to displace problems (cars, noise, pollution..., and deprived populations) to other parts of the urban territory.

Keywords: Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, urban planning, narratives, Foucault, socio-spatial inequalities, neoliberalisation

1. Introduction

Recent research has suggested that contemporary urban policies in the field of travel and transport, while making reference to “sustainable mobility” goals, may contribute to reproducing or increasing socio-spatial inequalities in urban territories (see, for example, Boussauw and Vanoutrive, 2017; Schwanen, 2016; Kaufmann et al., 2007; Baeten, 2000). These social consequences often appear to be neglected or hidden in framing transport problems and in the discourse of local stakeholders and decision-makers, which is no doubt partially due to the non-politicization or depoliticization of the mobility questions observed by other authors (Kębłowski and Bassens, 2018; Kębłowski et al., 2016). These adverse effects on a social level shed light on a contradiction, a discrepancy between the goals of these sustainable mobility policies and their consequences, since the notion of sustainability includes the notion of social sustainability. It therefore appears to be important to develop critical work on current urban mobility policies that most usually come within the sustainable mobility paradigm (Banister, 2008).

Urban mobility policies did not begin to develop in France until the 1980s, after the government implemented its decentralisation laws (1981) and a regulatory framework for drawing up *Plans de Déplacements Urbains* (PDUs – Urban Travel Plans) in 1982. These approaches then became the subject of research. In France, the pioneering studies by Lassave (1987) and Offner (1996) on the first

mobility planning processes marked the advent of the social sciences in a field – transports – that had previously been dominated by economists and engineers. This research was pursued in the 1990s and 2000s, looking into new generations of Urban Travel Plans, with a stronger integration of the sustainable mobility aspect due to developments in the regulatory framework laid down by the government (these plans can be considered as equivalent to the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, SUMP, that have now been drawn up in many European countries under the impetus of the European Commission; European Commission, 2005, 2009). Not without an evaluative dimension, these studies regularly pointed out the limits of such policies from two principal angles. Firstly, they showed that SUMP's priorities, which were aimed at developing new infrastructure facilities as an alternative to the automobile, are not enough to significantly reduce the automobile's modal share (Offner, 2006; Dupuy, 2006; Wiel, 2007; Orfeuil, 2008). Secondly, they showed that discussions and citizen participation, put forward as powerful principles in the SUMP (CERTU, 2003; Lindenau and Böhler-Baedeker, 2014; Arsenio et al., 2016) are, in the end, quite limited and controlled and do not allow all social groups to express themselves (Frère, 2011; Paulhiac-Scherrer, 2011).

We feel that a more overall assessment of the limits of these approaches can be carried out by putting them back into the wider context of the evolution of urban governance in Western capitalist societies and the changes in urban policy and urban planning priorities (Harvey D, 1989). It then becomes useful to mobilise the research carried out in the field of Urban Studies, which have observed a return of social and spatial inequalities and an intensification of competition between metropolitan areas. The concept of neoliberalisation in urban policies, which has given rise to lively academic controversies, is used to defend a rather radical thesis – that urban policies have lost all their redistributive goals. They are put to the service of an overarching agenda, that of territorial competition in a globalised economy (Brenner and Theodore, 2002a). The tools and instruments of public action appear to have been “reprogrammed” by and for this neoliberal rationality (Dardot and Laval, 2009).

The transport sector is favourable to empirical contributions to stimulate reflections on the neoliberal rationality that formats urban policies. It helps us to understand the regulatory challenges of the flows inherent to the way contemporary capitalist societies work (Sheller and Urry, 2000). Through its mobility planning, it reveals metropolitan strategies in terms of the evolution and organisation of traffic flows, networks and territories (Graham and Marvin, 2001). It sheds light on the rationalities and prioritisation that often works against the need to control carbon-based travel, as has been shown in critical transport studies (Aldred, 2012; Culver, 2017; Koglin, 2017).

This study comprises a contribution to this subject, dealing with the case of France. It proposes a critical view of the contemporary SUMP by presenting an overview of research and empirical results dealing with the narratives and the implementation of these policies. Rooted in contemporary academic debates on neoliberalisation in urban policy, the hypothesis presented in this article is that SUMP tend to exacerbate intra-urban spatial and social specialisation. Our empirical studies, however, have shed light on what first appeared to us to be a theoretical paradox. We had clearly identified a model of organisation and regulation of flows and traffic that was fairly standard from one town to another (Reigner and Hernandez, 2007). And yet, this highly coherent, spatially and socially selective urban order appears to be coming about even though no apparent coalition of players has ostensibly come into play to put it into operation. Interviews with players who have taken part in the SUMP process have enabled us to take stock of the relative chaos in interests, the complexity of their arrangements and the sincerity of the commitment by a large number of players often working for sustainable mobility, their uncertainties and their dissatisfactions. This result is incompatible with the most radical Marxist studies that explain that, in terms of the mechanisms at work, urban policies fuel inequalities because they are the product of public players serving the

interests of the large capitalist firms (Castells, 1973). Based on these empirical observations, we have turned to the Foucauldian approaches to neoliberalism. Indeed, Foucault demonstrated the diffuse character of the goal of urban order. Consequently, he said, it is illusory to seek to identify the players who are putting this goal forward (Foucault, 1994). This analysis framework is relevant and suited to the study of SUMP. We therefore decided to study these urban policies, not so much from the angle of the players who guide them, but rather by informing their framework and the diffuse, predominant representations that tend to impose behavioural standards and to regulate behaviours on the one hand (section 2) and, on the other, by documenting their instrumentation and their effective, spatialized deployment in towns (section 3).

Firstly, urban transport policies were analysed as narratives. Stressing users' individual responsibility and their capacity to adopt economically rational behaviours, and conveying moral injunctions for them to adopt the 'right', safe, healthy, sustainable mobility behaviours, a depoliticized framing of issues characterizes these public policies. Referring to theoretical frameworks related to neoliberalisation as a rationality (Foucault, 1994; Brown, 2003, 2006), our hypothesis is that a neoliberal rationality feeds these policies by ignoring a certain number of macrosocial determinants (Reigner, 2016). Moreover, the use of morality works as a powerful democratic anaesthetic that dissolves any objection. Secondly, we studied how these policies, legitimated by 'noble causes' and depoliticized, influence the organization of traffic in the city, and to what extent they lead to a selective and uneven treatment of urban spaces.

From an empirical point of view, the developments presented are based on the scientific literature concerning the analysis of travel and transport planning in French cities or comparing French cities and other cities. The references used include publications covering our own work on this subject (see text in the box). A large share of the articles mentioned was published in French-language reviews. The studies published were often based on an analysis of the SUMP drawn up and applied in French cities. As briefly mentioned above, in a context of urban sprawl, growing automobile traffic and increasing public concern for the quality of urban life, the French State has encouraged¹ and then required² cities to develop Urban Travel Plans which, since 1996, are supposed to include safe and sustainable mobility goals and can be assimilated to Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP). These SUMP are detailed, technical urban planning documents that lay down the stakes, establish priorities for action and planning the spatial deployment of travel policy instruments (layout of tram lines, the perimeter of pedestrian areas, hubs, etc.). These SUMP reveal and design the desired sustainable city, the ideal future that urban stakeholders would like to achieve in organising mobility in the city. Furthermore, these voluminous planning documents are often summarised and accompanied by communication documents produced by the cities for the general public, and which explain and justify the choices and priorities of urban travel and transport policies. These communication documents provide access to the arguments used to justify the urban planning priorities put forward, while the planning document in and of itself is more technical and provides details on the instruments used and locates where they are applied in the city.

¹ Orientation Law on Domestic Transport (LOTI - Loi d'Orientation sur les Transports Intérieurs), Law 82-1153, 30 December 1982. The *LOTI law* created the Urban Travel Plans. The aim was to promote an urban transport system in favour of public transport.

² Law on the Air and Rational Energy Use (LAURE – Loi sur l'Air et l'Utilisation Rationnelle de l'Energie), Law 96-1236, 30 December 1996, and Law on Solidarity and Urban Renewal (SRU – Loi Relative à la Solidarité et au Renouvellement Urbains), Law 2000-1208, 13 December 2000. The *LAURE law* reactivated Urban Travel Plans to play an ecological and public health role. Cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants had to elaborate such plans, in order to work out their own sustainable mobility management.

A series of studies on French SUMPs developed since the early 2000s

Our own work has dealt with the process of producing the SUMPs drawn up in French cities since the early 2000s. They combine several research operations.

1) In-depth analysis of SUMPs in four cities

In-depth analyses were carried out in the cities of Marseille, Grenoble, Aix en Provence and Aubagne between 1999 and 2007 (Hernandez, 2003; Lucas, Reigner, Hernandez, 2006; Hernandez, Reigner, 2007; Reigner, Hernandez, 2007). The aim was to gain access to the underlying strategies behind the evolution foreseen for networks, flows and mobility. For this, the SUMPs were studied from a spatial point of view by taking a precise, exhaustive inventory of the planned projects. At the same time, some fifteen interviews were carried out per site with the players working on these processes. We continue to monitor the updates to the SUMPs in these cities.

2) An overview of SUMPs in the 26 largest urban areas in France

In 2011, we gathered SUMPs from urban areas with over 200,000 residents (as meant by INSEE's urban units in 2007). We were able to gain access to the SUMPs for 26 of these 30 urban areas. The analyses carried out on this corpus enabled us to validate and refine the results obtained in the 4 cities studied in an in-depth manner.

3) The analysis of the communication documents that accompany the production of SUMPs

The SUMP production process is accompanied by many communication campaigns to promote the necessity for sustainable mobility. There are two kinds of these.

They may be produced by the local authorities in charge of SUMPs to draw up a synthesis. Indeed, SUMPs are the subject of local citizen consultation procedures called public inquiry procedures.

Alongside these documents produced by the local authorities in charge of SUMPs, there are also local communication supports in favour of sustainable mobility that are available to the local players, but are produced either by community federations (the "Groupement des Autorités Organisatrices des Transports Urbains" – "Group of Urban Transport Organising Authorities" network), or by national agencies that depend on the State. This is notably the case of communication orchestrated by ADEME (Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maitrise de l'Energie – French Agency for the Environment and Energy Management) during "European Mobility Week".

These documents have been collected little by little since 2002 and give rise to qualitative analyses of contents and discourses.

2. Bringing order to behaviours. Framing the challenges of safe, sustainable mobility: neoliberal rationality

Exponents of the sociology of public action have constantly shown that public policies are far from being rational, positivist, scientific responses deployed to solve public problems. They are vehicles for narratives (Radaelli, 2000; Sfez 2002), myths (Barthes, 1957), dramatic fictions (Gusfield, 1981), frameworks and worldviews (Muller, 1994). In fact, the discourse on solving public problems presupposes defining them and the causal links between the problem, public action and its effects. These discursive forms are cognitive and argumentative repertoires that stakeholders use to define and legitimise their action. These narratives "*may well be false representations of reality, and recognised as such, they nonetheless survive and manage to establish themselves*" (Radaelli, 2000, p. 257). These narratives may diffuse false, artificial causalities through the "natural" association of a system of facts and a system of values, but they are nonetheless commonly accepted. These discursive forms deserve to be identified as they have the potential to inform us as to the meaning given to the action, its anonymous ideology (Barthes, 1957).

It is possible to identify registries arising from public speech that have in common the fact that they conceal a whole series of reasoning on the hierarchy of economic and social causalities. This is not totally new (Gusfield, 1981), but it appears to have intensified and to have been diffused throughout all sectors of public action (François and Neveu 1999). Neoliberal rationality appears to be at work

(Dardot and Laval, 2009) in shaping how the challenges and instruments of public action are framed (Lascombes and Le Galès, 2004).

This second section looks into the framing of contemporary travel and transport policies in France in order to identify the main discursive registers. Three characteristics are brought to the fore. Clearly, current policies in favour of sustainable mobility seek to govern *homo economicus* (sub-section 2.1), but by activating powerful moral injunctions as well (sub-section 2.2) to bring individual responsibility to the fore (sub-section 2.3). Thus, from the viewpoint of framing the challenges, the field of travel and transport policies in France today can be characterised by a neoliberal rationality.

By ignoring a large part of the social determinants, this neoliberal framing of sustainable mobility policies does not encourage the search for collective solutions in response to both environmental and social goals, at least offsetting the current trends toward growth in social and spatial inequalities (notably connected to economic globalisation and the phenomenon of metropolisation)³. Furthermore, as we shall see in section 3, this framing leads to using the tools of sustainable mobility in favour of strategies of attractiveness and spatial competition, contributing to upgrading certain sectors of the city and producing such effects as gentrification and inequality in terms of accessibility.

2.1 Governing rational individuals-stakeholders

Among the strong registers in contemporary public action, a large number of social science studies have converged in pointing out the degree to which *homo economicus* has become the nearly exclusive target of public action and in governing behaviours. Public actions are aimed at orienting behaviours, reduced to rational individual choices, outside any social construction. This extension of economic rationality to the government of individual behaviours is at work in the field of travel and transport.

The rational and calculating individual: the target of neoliberal public action

The extension and dissemination of market values to all sectors of public action and to all institutions is considered one of the major characteristics of the contemporary period (Dardot and Laval, 2009). Regulating individuals' behaviours to bring them in line with the model of perfectly rational economic behaviours appears to be a major goal of public action (Brown, 2006). Contrary to *laissez-faire* economics, this stimulates active policies supported by public stakeholders (the State, local authorities), which institute the market and competition and "reprogram" their instruments by and for this goal (Hibou, 2012). For Dardot and Laval (2009), this is precisely the foundation of the contemporary model of governmentality, a global model of rationality, called neoliberal, whose aim is to subject all spheres of activity to the principle of competition, even the very concept of the individual, a self-entrepreneur.

Defined in this way, neoliberal rationality moulds citizenship by subjecting every aspect of social life to an economic calculus. Citizen-individuals are pushed by a set of public policy tools (incentives or sanctions) to behave as calculating beings and are encouraged to fall into line with economically rational behaviours. Neoliberal rationality transforms citizens into customer-individuals or entrepreneur-individuals responsible for their choices and therefore for their living conditions. For Brown, this neoliberal rationality stimulates a process of deactivation of democracy when the citizens are nothing more than "rational economic actors in every sphere of life" (Brown, 2006, p. 694), when "citizenship, reduced to self-care, is divested of any orientation toward the common" (Brown, 2006, p. 695).

³ We could mention, for example, the proposals by Mignot and Rosales-Montano (2006) and Mignot (2008), who aimed at reducing inequality in mobility and access to jobs by encouraging the development of low-pollution, low-cost urban cars and, in terms of public transport, giving strong priority to peripheral urban spaces.

This economisation of behaviours, i.e. their transformation into behaviours that can be directed based on a system of economic and symbolic sanctions, has been developed for many sectors and subjects of public action. Historically, the field of public health, with policies against smoking (Berlivet, 2004), obesity (Bergeron et al., 2016) and road insecurity (Reigner, 2005) has provided many illustrations of this trend. The field of public action in favour of sustainable development has also inspired a large number of studies that have pointed out this process of individualisation and this extension of the economic rationality to individual conducts (Salles, 2005): policies in favour of selective waste sorting (Barbier, 2002), walking to school (Pigalle, 2016) and, more generally, sustainable mobility, which is our subject here.

If this framing of public problems is pointed out by many studies in the social sciences, it is because it has major effects. By choosing to ignore social determinants and social practices, this governing of individual behaviours contributes to maintaining or even reinforcing social inequalities (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2016) and the sanitisation of the social aspects (Fassin, 2008).

The example of “free mode choice”

This framing of public problems, favouring the economic calculus of rational individuals, is particularly clear in policies encouraging the use of travel modes as alternatives to the automobile. These policies are based on the principle of free mode choice. This principle translates into incentives to use transport modes that are alternatives to the automobile, combining an improvement in the offer (improvement in public transport service by expanding the network and/or the best service frequencies, pedestrian or cycling layouts, often in the most central areas of the city) and especially the implementation of pricing tools that discourage automobile use (expansion of paid parking areas and increasing prices, introduction of urban toll systems⁴, increasing fines, increasing the probability of being penalised).

These policies thus seek to change mobility behaviours by counting on the economic calculus made by rational individuals. The concept of modal shift is used to assess the capacity of these public policies to take a greater market share away from automobile travel. The fact that the mode choice is not really a free choice but rather depends on a number of constraints is often recognised (see, for example, Van Acker et al., 2010). More fundamentally, the relevance of the free mode choice paradigm has been widely called into question by many academic studies (see, for example, Kaufmann, 2003; Dupuy, 2006; Paulhiac and Kaufmann, 2006). Indeed, reasoning in terms of free mode choice leads to ignoring the social determinants of mobility in city traffic flows. Sustainable mobility policies that focus on the individual to limit the place of cars in cities, to fight against the all-pervasiveness of the automobile, without more generally asking about the functions of mobility in city traffic flows, are increasingly criticised by academic studies that look into the stakes of mobility as a social challenge that is tending to become more and more acute (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Jaffe et al., 2012).

Despite these criticisms from the academic world, the paradigms, instruments and communication of policies in favour of safe, sustainable mobility are strongly influenced by a rationality that defines individual behaviours as the key to solving public problems, seeking to standardise these individual behaviours by encouraging them to fall into line with a rational economic calculus of the cost-benefit type, working to educate them to convince them of the merits of this rationality. While this framing could be questioned, urban travel and transport policies in favour of sustainable mobility are

⁴ Since 2010, the regulation of automobile access to the city through fees has been possible in France by setting up urban toll systems. Law No. 2010-788 of 12 July 2010 containing the national commitment to the environment, JORF No. 0160 of 13 July 2010.

amazingly sheltered from controversies and public debates. The morality and noble causes invoked certainly have something to do with this.

2.2 Governing without controversy: invoking morality and noble causes

Discursive registers that use morality are found everywhere when speaking of policies in favour of safe, sustainable mobility. Along the lines of Brown (2006), for whom a moralising temptation in policies is a global fact of policy concerning all Western societies and which can take on different forms depending on the national context in which it is observed, as well as with reference to French studies that seek to diffuse her theories in France (Jeanpierre, 2006, 2007), we have sought to characterise the moral framework of sustainable urban transport policies.

Sustainability, health and safety.

In France, three main causes have been put forward since the middle of the 1990s to justify urban travel and transport policies: *sustainability, health and safety*.

Sustainability and public health are two major causes that are jointly mobilised in urban travel and transport policies to justify public intervention in favour of improving air quality and promoting active mobility. In the France of the 1990s, SUMPs and the LAURE Law (Loi sur l'air et l'utilisation rationnelle de l'énergie – Law on the Air and Rational Energy Use) provided an opportunity for alternative travel modes to cars to be put on urban government agendas. The goal of improving air quality gave rise to the injunction to “bouger autrement”⁵ (move differently), i.e. “move without polluting”⁶, to leave the car in the garage and take public transports or use soft modes of transport. The term “soft modes” prevailed in France to designate travel modes that are not aggressive for the city, for the urban landscape, or for the environment – mainly walking or cycling. With the rise in concerns for public health, “soft modes” became “active modes” and with this, the pedestrian and the cyclist, already considered as virtuous and responsible, found ways to be in good health by getting regular physical activity. “Bouger c'est la santé” (Moving is Healthy), “Bouger 30 minutes par jour, c'est facile”⁷ (It's easy to move 30 minutes a day) said the slogans of the times. We were told just to ride your bike to buy your bread, walk the dog longer than usual, take the stairs rather than the lift, try gardening or walk to school⁸. This intensive institutional communication was produced by agencies under the authority of the Ministry of Health, which provided associations and local authorities with a number of resources and communication kits. Since 2016, these initiatives have been centralised at the French Agency for Public Health (Santé publique France) agency, after initially being promoted by the INPES (National Institute of Prevention and Education for Health) as part of the “Manger Bouger” (Eat and Move) campaign⁹. The use of soft – and now active – modes is presented, not only as a way of travelling that helps to improve air quality, but also as an effective way of combating obesity and its consequences for the population's health. Thanks to these active modes, the aim is to free the city of the automobile and its nuisances and to kill two birds with one stone for public health by reducing both pollution and the negative consequences of a sedentary lifestyle.

The second major moral register of urban travel and transport policies combines sustainability and safety. It is a bit more recent. In 2000, the SRU Law (Loi solidarité et renouvellement urbains – Law on Solidarity and Urban Renewal) took up the problem of safety and soft travel modes. Pedestrians and cyclists are rightly considered to be vulnerable users in cases of traffic accidents placing them in

⁵ www.toulouse.fr/web/transports-mobilite, Ville de Toulouse (2014).

⁶ Communication campaign for “European Mobility Week 2014”, www.grand-troyes.fr, Ville de Troyes (2014).

⁷ www.inpes.sante.fr, INPES, Santé publique France (2010).

⁸ www.inpes.sante.fr, INPES, Santé publique France (2004).

⁹ These agencies make these resources available on dedicated internet platforms: www.mangerbouger.fr (www.santepubliquefrance.fr).

conflict with motor vehicles¹⁰. The SRU Law sought to encourage walking and cycling by asserting that the first objective of SUMP is to *“improve the safety of all travel, [...] notably by setting up an observatory for accidents involving at least one pedestrian or cyclist”*¹¹. In doing this, the challenges of road safety and sustainable mobility, which until then had been the subject of separate sector-based policies, became an integral part of policies in favour of safe, sustainable mobility.

Historically in France, the rise of road safety as a public problem was connected to the spread of the discourse of authority from the medical professions and the Church, using moralistic tones (Decreton, 1993). In the context of a strong growth in automobile use of the 1950s, doctors denounced the social costs of the road carnage, the leading cause of death among young people between 16 and 24 years of age. The Church rounded out the medical hygienist discourse by stressing the responsibility of the drivers, considering them as killers on the road and guilty of deviant behaviours. We can see here the same process as that described by Gusfield, who viewed the construction of the drunk driving challenge in the United States as a communication campaign serving a moral order (Gusfield, 1981). Science and the law concerning road safety present a world in which there is clear moral responsibility and where the causes and effects in terms of road safety are influenced only by the driver’s good or bad behaviour. The driver’s responsibility is therefore what is targeted by public action.

Still today, this monocausal, moralistic view of how traffic accidents are produced permeates road safety policies (Reigner, 2005). It has spread throughout the field of sustainable mobility through the challenges of safety for vulnerable users and takes part in the expansion of the moral doctrine. This can be seen, for example, in events such as the *“La Semaine de la Mobilité et de la Sécurité Routière”* (Mobility and Road Safety Week) or *“La Quinzaine des Usagers Vulnérables”* (The Fortnight of the Vulnerable User). These communication campaigns order us to all be vigilant, to choose a mode of transport that respects the environment, or not to be a *“killer on the road”*¹². These initiatives are put forward by governmental institutions that supply communication documents on internet platforms (the *“bougez autrement”* – move differently – campaign, for example) to provide support for local initiatives and projects.

The noble causes of Urban Transport Policies (sustainability, health and safety) thus lead to three moral injunctions: move without polluting, move thirty minutes a day for your health, and move but don’t kill. Legitimized by the mention of noble causes such as preserving an acceptable environment for future generations as well as people’s safety and health, these narratives are presented naturally as being obvious, imposing the right way of doing things, the right way of behaving. The use of moral injunctions by the promoters of these public policies contributes to a process of depoliticization.

Fragile challenges in the face of moralisation

Although they involve numerous stakeholders with differing interests, the urban travel planning operations have given rise to the production of a remarkable consensus. In France, despite participatory procedures in the public debates that accompany the drafting of SUMP, any discordant voices are fragmented and receive little publicity. The space for the debates is limited, the procedure is formatted, and the consultations are reduced to a prerequisite for the social acceptability of the decisions (Frère, 2011). Stakeholders who could put forward alternative views, notably concerning the social challenges of mobility, are almost systematically absent (Paulhiac-Scherrer, 2011). The

¹⁰ Cyclists and pedestrians have risks of injury per kilometre covered five to ten times greater than car passengers (Elvik and Vaa, 2004). These differences, however, are not so large when considering the risk per trip, or per hour spent travelling (see, for example, McAndrews et al., 2013).

¹¹ Law on Solidarity and Urban Renewal (SRU - Loi Relative à la Solidarité et au Renouvellement Urbains), Law 2000-1208, 13 December 2000, article 96.

¹² <http://www.securiteroutiere-idf.fr/entreprise>, Direction régionale et interdépartementale de l’équipement et de l’aménagement d’Ile-de-France (accessed in 2017).

debate sites are characterised by pluralism, of course, but this pluralism tends to welcome “responsible partners” only (Crouch, 2004). There is therefore a very good chance that any conflict will be nipped in the bud. Conflicts sometimes come up in the road aspect around the edges of SUMP: projects for completing urban bypass roads where sections have not been built entail digging costly tunnels (Grenoble) or crossing prestigious vineyards (Bordeaux). But the great moral superiority of ecological and health justifications provides unquestionable strength to the most central projects related to promoting sustainable mobility. It causes all challenges to melt away: projects aimed at promoting soft modes such as trams or free-service bicycles may well give rise to public debate procedures, but they are covered by such virtue that very few people would dare question the legitimacy of the layout of the tram lines, challenge the cost of the layout of key areas for urban quality or raise issues about granting the free-service bicycle contract to the multinational corporation, JC Decaux¹³.

And yet alternative framings do exist, but the contemporary use of morality complicates their expression. Criticising these public policies would condemn people to be on the side of those who want more people to be killed on the road, more pollution, and a deteriorated environment for future generations.

For road safety questions, a scientific analysis of the phenomena, when based on a systemic approach, leads to rejecting the moralistic approach to this public problem. For many researchers working on these subjects (in France, for example, see: Fleury, 1998; Van Elslande, 2000; Saad and Van Elslande, 2012), accidents are the result of dysfunctional situations in the interactions between the infrastructure, the traffic environment, the vehicle and the road user within a system in which the user is only the final regulator confronted with the complexity of situation. Putting the focus of explaining road safety problems on human faults, on a deliberate breaking of the rules, on an act of delinquency, is not considered relevant. According to these studies, drivers generally make mistakes that are often the consequence of non-perception or a poor interpretation of driving situations. Illegal behaviours are just a minor problem (Lie and Tingvall, 2002). Thus, actions should be organised more around error management, error tolerance, and more generally the design of the road transport system (Fleury, 1998; Johansson, 2009; Larsson et al., 2010). Vehicles are a decisive factor in accidents and especially their consequences and their seriousness: improved braking performance, ergonomics, material, equipment and limiting engine power will also provide increased safety. Likewise, the infrastructure and its layout are also decisive factors in accidents. For some authors, even though users must be required to comply with driving rules, the designers of the road transport system can, ultimately, be considered as responsible for road traffic safety (Johansson, 2009; Lie and Tingvall, 2002). This approach is backed up by the results of experiments in road system layout policies, notably in urban areas, carried out in the Netherlands in the 1970s, and then in all European countries in the 1980s. An assessment of them shows that they provide significant, sustained improvements in safety (Kjemtrup and Herrstedt, 1992). And yet, despite these experiments, the predominant framing of this public problem remains one of a direct causal link between accidents and driver performance, against a backdrop of condemning bad behaviours that alter this performance, and the observations made by Gusfield are, for a large part, still valid today: *“The role of specific makes of vehicles in auto accidents, the implications of various building plans and materials, the possibility of alternative forms of transportation, the costs of mobility in auto travel, or any widespread movement to lower auto fatalities by means other than influencing driver performance is absent from the news accounts and major legislation.”* (Gusfield, 1981, p. 44). In

¹³ This example is interesting. The self-service bicycle system in Paris, Vélib', gave rise to a lively controversy between the Paris City Hall (Socialist) and certain elected members of the municipal council from the ecologist party (les Verts). The latter denounced a system that was expensive and privatised public spaces and the advertising market. Les Verts nonetheless decided not to vote against the Vélib' project. Interviews carried out with these officials showed that this change of heart came from their difficulty in justifying a vote that would have been misunderstood and interpreted as being against bicycle use in the city (Tironi, 2011). On the subject of criticism of the economic model of free-service bicycles in France, see also Huré, 2017.

France, this concept of almost exclusively laying the blame for safety problems on drivers manifests itself in the main road safety laws (Law of 18 June 1999 and Law of 12 June 2003; Reigner et al., 2009).

On the subject of sustainable mobility, alternative narratives also exist that criticise the underpinnings of contemporary policies. First of all, the focus on individual responsibility and the relevance of the “free mode choice” paradigm is called into question. This way of looking at the transport mode issue on the individual level presupposes that individuals have a choice and can choose between several alternatives. But, according to Dupuy (2006), the “free choice” paradigm becomes obsolete in a context where the rate of household automobile ownership reaches 80% (as is the case in France – see Orfeuil, 2010) and where the automobile obtains a radical monopoly over other travel modes. An automobile-based system is at work. The city and contemporary lifestyles have been and continue to be shaped by this system. Thus, *“it is as if competition is distorted against non-automobile modes given the difficulty they have to ensure excessively long trips or travel that is dispersed over time and in space. [...] The obvious result of this situation is an absence of a real choice between modes, i.e. almost an obligation to use a car, a dependency”* (Dupuy, 2006, p. 39). But beyond the question of the (in)effectiveness of public policies based on the principle of “free mode choice”, there is also the question of the legitimacy of a public action that ignores the social determinants and stakes of mobility. The fragmentation of territories in everyday life (which entails covering ever greater distances) and the fragmentation of work (involuntary part time, interim jobs, precarious contracts, staggered working hours) considerably restrict people’s choices, notably the most fragile among them (Le Breton, 2005; Orfeuil, 2010). Furthermore, car use is the most discriminating factor in travel inequality and household income is a determinant in explaining this unequal access to a private car (Claisse et al., 2002; Dupuy et al., 2002). The emphasis placed on individual responsibility for sustainable mobility blurs the position of this public problem in a complex social structure.

Thus, policies in favour of safe, sustainable mobility have had widespread media coverage, but with a relative absence of policy debate on how to frame the problem. While these challenges are on the agenda of all urban governments, it should be pointed out that the consensus now dominates the way that they are dealt with. Contesting the consensus is stifled by the moralisation and depoliticization of the underlying challenges.

From the disqualification of discordant voices to depoliticization. Using morality to deactivate democracy

Using morality in politics works to channel controversies and to anaesthetise democracy, encouraging what some people have called post-political urban management (Swyngedouw, 2005), the post-democratic evolution of urban societies (Crouch, 2004) or de-democratisation (Brown, 2006). We share the observation made by Swyngedouw concerning the depoliticization of the contemporary framing of environmental problems and their treatment, the narrowness of the debates, and the inexistence of alternative socio-ecological trajectories. We also share the analyses of Crouch when he asserts that disagreement is possible so long as it stays within the framework of the general consensus model put forward by the elites, and that pluralistic inclusion in urban governance is possible so long as the party included is considered to be a “responsible partner”, which tends to exclude the working classes. Lastly, we share Brown’s intuition that this use of morality in politics undermines the foundations of the project for creating the political subject that liberal democracy is based on and deactivates liberal democracies (Brown, 2003, 2006). This process of de-democratisation of Western societies is fed by the use of morality in politics as it helps to depoliticize social problems, transfers responsibility to the individual level and gets the consumer-customer-citizen to accept a high degree of governance and authority.

By eliminating the possibility of debate as to the soundness of the chains of arguments linking the problems and the solutions, these registers of justification limit the debate on the effectiveness of

the policies. It is thus no surprise that the conditions for success or failure of public action are seen in terms of the responsibility of 'good' or 'bad' individual behaviour.

2.3 Governing responsible individuals

The emphasis placed on individual responsibility in the framing of public problems is a strong trend that affects contemporary debates and contemporary public spaces (François and Neveu, 1999) in which citizens are considered as responsible for their own fate, and, consequently, structural inequalities are depoliticized so that they can be interpreted as careless or irresponsible individual choices (Garapon, 2008; Brawley, 2009). This tendency is particularly visible in the transport and travel policies that manage sustainable mobility issues, with actions that are oriented toward educating citizens who are expected to adopt rational urban behaviour. Thus, through their behaviour and choices, individuals are considered as being the source of problems (air pollution, road insecurity, traffic congestion, etc.) while holding the keys to solving these problems. This leads to the growing importance given to pedagogical communication policies oriented toward educating citizens who are expected to adopt good civic urban behaviour.

Communication and education in the management of sustainable mobility issues

There is a consensus among the stakeholders involved in contemporary travel and transport policies in favour of sustainable mobility – communication is a must! The successes and failures of public actions may be imputed to the quality of communication with city dwellers and users. If the importance placed on communication is not unique to this field of public action (Neveu, 2001), we must admit that it plays a central role in it.

An analysis of this abundant institutional communication makes it possible to detect constants, both in form (graphics, colours, iconography, etc.) and in content (arguments used, their sequencing, writing style, slogans, etc.). These documents are highly standardised. They make extensive use of the pedagogical register. In France, this use of pedagogy in the political discourse has been on the rise since the 1990s. The pedagogical imperative is no longer just aimed at young people, but rather at society as a whole to deal with a wide variety of subjects (Pautard, 2015).

The pedagogical imperative is part child guidance and part willing submission. Child guidance when this public education aims at increasing awareness among individuals in terms of their responsibility for environmental problems and orienting their behaviours so that they become “*eco-mobile and eco-responsible*” citizens and “*stakeholders in sustainable mobility*”. General mobilisation for small gestures is a constant in these pedagogically-targeted communication documents that assert, for example, that “*the responsibility of every one of us lies in our ability to change our behaviours. It is unquestionably the sum of all of these virtuous attitudes that will reverse the trends observed and will bring down toxic CO₂ emissions and other greenhouse emissions into the air*”¹⁴. The design work behind these pedagogical messages, delegated to communication professionals, mobilise childish imagery with a didactic, guilt-laden tone. There is willing submission when good practices and exemplary behaviours are showcased, combined with forms of persuasion that mobilise marketing and social psychology techniques toward the consumer-citizen (green games and educational kits with game boards).

We are therefore indeed dealing with forms of distanced framing of individual practices (Foucault, 1994). Pedagogical communication participates in training customers-consumers willing to accept a degree of governance and authority. The pedagogical imperative permeates the communication strategies used to convince citizens of the correctness of actions by the government, the State, local

¹⁴ Groupement des Autorités Responsables des Transports (2010), *Je deviens acteur de la mobilité durable (I'm becoming a player for sustainable mobility)*, educational brochure, www.gart.org, p. 1, p. 3.

authorities and public stakeholders. Pedagogy is used to encourage acceptance of government decisions by the citizens, convincing them that their policy choices are well founded.

From the categorisation of “good” and “bad” users to the selective organisation of mobility in the city

This use of morality is accompanied by a categorisation of users as “good” or “bad”. This consolidates an individualised, psychologised treatment of mobility issues. This discursive register is not just discourse. It is mobilised to legitimise traffic controls and to justify a selective organisation of mobility in city traffic flows. This takes the form of expanded surveillance and control tools, but also in a more subtle way through the layouts of public spaces and road systems.

Surveillance and control technologies are widely-used tools in policies seeking to regulate traffic in cities (Wood and Graham, 2006). Since the early 2000s, a twofold movement of increased controls and harsher punishment has been at work. This stricter law enforcement is backed up by surveillance technologies such as cameras on the streets to issue tickets for people running red lights, traffic driving in bus lanes, or failure to pay for parking, automatic radars for speed checks, more cameras to organise restricted access to certain urban spaces (around the perimeter of urban toll areas and pedestrian areas). Moreover, this technological expansion of controls is increasingly combined with automated sanctions.

But sorting uses and users can take on much more subtle forms. The layouts of road systems and public spaces are applied progressively and, with the excuse of improving urban quality, they make one use possible here and another there. More importantly, certain uses are made impossible, thus eliminating users considered as unvirtuous. This regulated mobility in cities leads to bringing order to traffic flows *to suggest who can move about in the different areas of the city*. Operations for the spatial sorting of uses are also operations of social sorting of users and this coupling of spatial sorting and social sorting is particularly apparent in the most strategic locations of city traffic flows. This ordering of spaces is the subject of the third section of this article.

3. Bringing order to traffic and territories. Selective and uneven treatment of urban spaces

Urban order, social control, and the control of flows and movement in the city have always been a concerns and an issue of power. Free, uncontrolled circulation of flows is seen as a factor of disorder and danger that the authorities have always tried to direct and plan (Oblet, 2005). In fact, the selective organisation of mobility in cities through urban planning and travel safety and transport policies is a particularly salient issue in contemporary urban policies. The issue of orderly traffic in cities appears to have been renewed as contemporary capitalism has sped up its control, demanding free traffic flows on the one hand and, on the other, exacerbating competition between cities to attract investments, major firms, higher-income, creditworthy populations, consumers and tourists.

3.1 The current context of urban transport policies: entrepreneurialism and competition between cities

Since the 1970s, various studies – and notably those by the geographer David Harvey – have highlighted the changes in urban policies in the years 1960–1990 toward “entrepreneurial” policies (Harvey, 1989; MacLeod, 2002; Molotch, 1976; Leitner, 1990). These policies are influenced by the growing role of private economic interests in local governance, by a shift of concerns for the availability and redistribution of services and amenities to urban populations toward that of local attractiveness in a context of competition between cities, and by strategies aimed more specifically at a “*place*”¹⁵ rather than at a *territory*. It is more a question of attracting investments and resources, qualified populations, solvent populations, consumers, visitors and tourists, rather than meeting the

¹⁵ We use the word ‘place’ here with the meaning that D. Harvey gives it when he speaks of “the political economy of place rather than of territory” (Harvey, 1989, p. 7).

needs of a population living in the urban territory. These processes of unequal development and spatial competition are, for many authors, consubstantial with capitalist economics and its contemporary developments (see, for example, MacLeod, 2002; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Smith, 1984). These evolutions were first brought to light in the United States and Great Britain, but they have not spared the cities of continental Europe, and notably France, although they no doubt take on different forms there (Lever, 1999; Pereira and Nofre, 2011; John and Cole, 1998). Of course, this general trend does not mean that redistributive mechanisms are not also at work at the same time (such as in the areas of social housing or education, for example).

The change in focus (from the territory toward the place) introduced through the entrepreneurial mutation of urban policies has been accompanied by a shift in the notion of the city as a territorial unit toward the symbolic city summed up by its strategic sectors. The development of business districts (Peyroux et al., 2012), the concentration of redesign and improvement operations for public spaces in the historic centres, spaces with heritage or tourism value, shopping areas, train station districts, and certain residential neighbourhoods, whether areas that are already privileged or areas to be “taken back”, provide illustrations of the orientations of the attractiveness policies focused on an archipelago of strategic locations rather than the urban territory as a whole. This selectivity is for the most part implicit. When studying the status of Sydney as a “global city”, i.e. a city of world-class standing, McNeill et al. commented that the status of global city granted to Sydney is based “on an essentialisation of the central business district and historic core” of the city (McNeill et al., 2005, p. 939). For Robinson, there is a form of metonymy in the fact that an entire city is associated with the success and power of a small part of the city (Robinson, 2002).

Most of the authors we have mentioned agree on the importance of strategies based on branding and urban marketing in these entrepreneurial urban policies. Use of the media, the layout of public spaces, urban design, statuary, street art, cultural regeneration, showcasing the local heritage, the organisation of “mega-events”, festivals, attractions and recreation facilities, etc., all contribute to this urban marketing (Hubbard and Hall, 1998; Ashworth and Voogd, 1990). Major projects such as developing an underground train (metro) or tram network are also part of these strategies. As Frenay has pointed out, “in France especially, the revival of the tram [...] is just as much – if not more – an urban marketing stunt as it is a transport tool” (Frenay, 2004, p. 68).

This is the context in which current travel and transport policies are being developed and are then mobilised to contribute to urban marketing and the competition between cities, as well as to better serve the strategic locations and spatial organisation of the entrepreneurial city, thus tending to encourage spatial differentiation and an unequal development of the territory. Graham and Marvin (2001) have demonstrated this using many examples of urban expansion around the world. Like them, we have observed a planning logic in networks privileging the differential development of urban spaces and the production of spatial inequalities.

3.2 Bringing order to traffic flows

In France’s case, the analyses that we undertook on the SUMPs in 26 cities with more than 200,000 residents, and in a more in-depth way for the SUMPs of the cities of Grenoble, Aix en Provence and Aubagne (Reigner and Hernandez, 2007; Brenac et al., 2013) suggest that urban planning for travel and transport tends more toward serving urban attractiveness by optimising traffic flows in the cities. The equation that needs to be solved by the urban authorities is the following: how do you organise cohabitation between, on the one hand, the rapid, high-performance flows of goods, services and people considered necessary for the metropolis to function properly and, on the other, the slower flows of pedestrian traffic associated with the identity, the image and the quality of the historical European city and its tourism, cultural and business life? These two aspects, now considered by cities as two essential conditions for urban attractiveness, are reconciled through a differentiated treatment of urban spaces and infrastructures based on a specialisation of urban spaces.

On the one hand, an attractive metropolis must be well connected to the transport network and be rapidly accessible. For this, the metropolitan territory must include high-speed hubs: airports, TGV high-speed train stations and motorway interchanges, as the case may be. On the level of the urban area, above and beyond railway infrastructures, there must be a high-performance road network that can handle heavy traffic flows without becoming congested. This gives rise to projects for infrastructures dedicated to the automobile, ensuring shorter travel times.

Simultaneously, to be attractive and to rank high among the cities where life is good, a city also has to be a privileged place for shoppers, tourists and soft mobility. This leads to a restriction of automobile flows in certain urban spaces through layouts that come under the urban quality register, limiting the possibilities of using cars in the city (road sharing, segregated public transport corridors, limited surface parking, pedestrianisation) or aimed at moderating the speed of such cars (traffic calming zones). The notions of “sharing the road system” and “taking back the street”, for instance, are presented by their promoters as layout tools for redistributing public space in a way that is less favourable to automobiles, thereby reducing air pollution, limiting road insecurity, creating user friendliness, re-humanizing the city by reducing speeds, but also upgrading city centres and revitalizing their businesses. In other words, the automobile downgrades the city, and limiting its presence becomes a must for a dense, sustainable city. The objectives of restricted automobile access and greater urban quality are superposed.

In practice, this twofold requirement is taken into account through a territorial division: in the historic city centre there is protection against the automobile; in the urban outskirts, there are high-performance road infrastructures and large hubs. Regulating traffic flows leads to a gradual, horizontal sharing of the territory from the centre toward the outskirts. Depending on the case, there is also vertical sharing of the territory – on the surface the road system is largely used for non-motorised modes of travel, they become pedestrian areas, traffic calming zones or are laid out in urban boulevards with bus lanes and bicycle paths; underground, there are more and more underground parking structures and, in large urban areas, projects for cut-and-cover road sections and tunnels are being developed. Cars continue to enter into, or even to cross, the city centre, but they are hidden, buried (Hernandez, 2003).

Thus, while urban planning for transport and travel makes headlines with sustainable mobility, contemporary transport and travel do not seek to reduce polluting modes of travel overall, but rather to direct them onto bypass road infrastructures to reduce their negative impacts on the city's main sites. Automobile pollution (noise, congestion, air pollution, insecurity) is considered as a risk that must be reduced and eliminated from certain strategic, symbolic urban micro-territories. However, this model of traffic organisation founded on differentiated and graduated treatments of public spaces between the centre and the outskirts does not give rise to debate. It asserts itself as an obvious technical and depoliticized response. These urban policies would be at the service of an agenda dominating them, with the aim of ensuring an urban climate that is favourable to business and trade (Brenner, 2004). There is no doubt that highlighting the “quality of life” in historic, picturesque, heritage city centres partly meets the need to enhance an urban identity that is also a comparative advantage that European cities use and abuse, the perfect counter-model to the American XXL metropolis or the emerging world.

Including the objectives of attractiveness and territorial identity in urban transport policies in French cities has also been observed by other authors. Gallez and Maksim (2007), using an analysis of urban transport planning in Strasbourg, France, and in Geneva, Switzerland, also concluded that an emphasis is put on “the challenges of attractiveness and accessibility” and that “transports are mobilised to the benefit of strengthening territorial identity” (p. 61).

Richer (2007) also put forward the strong spatial differentiations brought about by such policies. Studying intermodal policies and the layout of interchange hubs through an analysis of SUMP in 14 French cities, he observed that projects for interchange hubs, “sometimes used as filters, sometimes

as hubs that multiply accessibility, are mostly associated with the construction of an “island” city model developed implicitly or explicitly” (p. 45). This model leads to a two-speed city: “the speed of the automobile in suburban areas and the speed of the pedestrian in the city centre, where the quality of spaces is preserved at the expense of the outskirts” (p. 46).

In their research on the case of Montreal, Paulhiac and Kaufmann (2006) came back to the sustainable transport policies applied in European cities, and notably in France, and observed that a “perimeter strategy” is often at work: “This consists in defining a perimeter of intervention from which the automobile will be banished while letting the city be structured for cars outside this perimeter” (p. 51). Another strategy that is also mentioned by these authors consists in sharply developing the public transport offer through “very high visibility” operations (tram or metro networks, for example) that do not reduce the volume of automobile traffic, but improve the city’s image by showcasing a determined policy in the area of sustainable transport (Paulhiac and Kaufmann, p. 51). Further on we shall see that these major investments in public transport usually benefit the central areas.

Overall, these studies reinforce the idea that travel and transport policies in French cities work toward differentiating and specialising urban spaces, and tend to displace environmental problems rather than actually solve them. But how is the differentiated treatment of urban spaces actually implemented and what tools are used? This is the subject of the following sub-section.

3.3. Instruments for bringing order to flows and territories

Here we shall discuss three major categories of instruments deployed in the name of sustainable mobility and quality of life in cities: prestigious projects for public transport in segregated corridors, layout work for public spaces and road systems, and the different ways of regulating automobile access to city centres. These instruments are surprising in terms of the selectivity of their spatial inscription.

Major urban public transport projects

Contemporary travel and transport policies in French cities are characterised by a desire to improve the public transport offer significantly. Without a detailed analysis of the layout and spatial impact of these new networks, one might view them as progressive policy. Trams are the showcase instrument. They comprise competition to the automobile, encouraging a modal shift. But trams are not only used as a way of providing service to centres that generate traffic flows (university campuses, hospitals, secondary centres). Indeed, this mode is presented by the municipal authorities as a vector for a new brand image and thus new attractiveness for the city (Frenay, 2004; Hernandez, 2013). A flagship project, the tram system can also be a solution to reinvigorate business and to upgrade the sectors crossed, whether they are business sectors or residential sectors. They are physically staged in the city through their layout, the treatment of their platforms and stations, and the design of the tram cars. Through a symbolism of shapes and the related rhetoric, this staging is also that of the city’s political project. So which spaces are given priority for them? Generally, the layout of lines of these prestigious projects for public transport in segregated corridors focus on central and semi-central areas. The 24 French cities that have implemented tram systems since the 1980s (between 1980 and 2014) in all comprise 1187 municipalities¹⁶, but only 156 of these municipalities receive service from the tram networks¹⁷. Tram projects often go hand-in-hand with urban operations that were already planned and are just an addition to the accessibility often provided by the bus network (Frenay, 2005). By using the main historical urban traffic arteries in the city centre, tram lines do not just reduce automobile traffic there, they take part in an overall

¹⁶ Including the suburban municipalities.

¹⁷ Urban areas equipped with trams since the 1900s or earlier (Lille, Marseille and Saint-Étienne) are not included in these figures. The trams in the town of Aubagne, which is part of the Marseille urban area, and in Saint-Louis, which depends on the Swiss urban area of Basel whose tram system also dates from before 1900, are not taken into account either.

revalorisation of spaces and tend to push up prices in the spaces they cross (CERTU, 1999). Except for well-served university campuses in some provincial cities, the quality of service of public transport networks gradually decreases as one moves toward the outskirts. This drop in the level of service can be observed in cities with a differential in quality between public transport lines in segregated corridors, which are the focus of a large share of the resources, and conventional bus lines with their more modest budgets (Pissaloux and Ducol, 2012). Both literally and figuratively, two-speed public transport networks are coming into being.

Furthermore, investments in public transport do not necessarily benefit the lower social categories. Access to a car plays a decisive role in access to the job market for the lower social categories such as blue-collar workers, given the greater dispersion of blue-collar jobs, making access to these jobs harder using public transport (Wenglenski and Orfeuill, 2004; Wenglenski, 2003, for the case of the Paris region). Concerning access to goods and resources, Caubel (2006) demonstrated that, in the case of the Lyon urban area, ambitious public transport development scenarios could improve accessibility for the lower social categories, but he pointed out that this would barely make up for the effects of the evolution observed in the location of business activities, which tend to be concentrated in spaces favourable to access by the wealthier social categories (and unfavourable to access by the lower social categories). Furthermore, according to Pucher and Lefèvre (1996), better access to public transport networks leads to a rise in property prices and also tends to push poor populations toward the outskirts that do not receive the same quality of public transport service. Such observations have led Mignot to assert that *“for the authorities that organise urban transports, the challenge today is thus to prioritise investments (and new financial efforts in general) in the suburbs and the outskirts”* (Mignot, 2008, p.72). Nonetheless, the major public transport infrastructures deployed in these outlying areas also tend to encourage socio-spatial segregation due to the foreseeable gentrification of spaces along the transport lines, as Enright (2013) has shown on the subject of the *Grand Paris Express* project in the Paris region.

Layouts of public spaces and road networks

In SUMPs, the notions of “road sharing” and “back to the street” are often presented as layout tools to redistribute public spaces in a way that is less favourable to the automobile, and in doing so, to reduce pollution, limit road insecurity, create user friendliness and re-humanise the city by reducing speed, but also to requalify city centres and reinvigorate their businesses. In practical terms, the quality of the treatment of public spaces increases as one gets closer to the centre, which the authorities seek to preserve from cars and their nuisances (Reigner and Hernandez, 2007). This work on the road system thus goes far beyond regulating automobile traffic – it shapes islands of urban quality disseminated in historical cores of urban territories and, in doing so, reinforces both legitimacy and property values in certain locations (Bureau and Glachant, 2010). This shaping of urban spaces and landscapes carried out in the name of sustainable mobility is not without social effects. It has a more or less decisive influence on the sociology of the residents of the area. From this point of view, Charmes clearly demonstrated how the picturesque image of the shared street conveys the image of a system of meanings and values that encourages the gentrification of the old faubourgs (Charmes, 2005). In Paris, as demonstrated by Clerval and Fleury, these road system requalification operations go hand-in-hand with the gentrification of certain neighbourhoods. Proof of this can notably be seen in the fact that the “green neighbourhood” label, which designates areas that have undergone this kind of operation, has become a selling point for real estate agencies (Clerval and Fleury, 2009).

Regulating automobile access to city centres

As a technical object that may be considered secondary, parking policy gives a good example of the selection made in the planning of urban travel (Claux, 2016). Alongside these policies, which seek to restrict the presence of automobiles by acting on the layout of public spaces, different kinds of users are identified and sorted. Fees are tools for implementing this sorting. Restricting automobile access

to the city centre is organised through tiered pricing for parking that gets more and more expensive the closer you get to the centre, both for underground parking and for surface parking. Furthermore, the amount of surface parking is rationed and the square metres dedicated to automobile parking are taken back when reorganising spaces in favour of urbanite strolling practices and non-motorised modes of travel. What is striking in this example of parking policies is that the subject of the dispute is not the automobile, all automobiles, but rather certain types of automobile uses (Bidaux, 2010). Indeed, urban operations for promoting the commercial attractiveness of city centres are always accompanied by an improvement in the parking supply, often in underground car parks. This accessibility for automobiles is considered by local stakeholders to be an instrument that largely determines the dynamism and attractiveness of urban spaces, even in the centre. Public efforts are aimed at the fight against what the French call “voitures ventouses” (literally “suction cup cars” – cars that never leave the parking space), those that do not have a good turnover rate, occupying spaces where shoppers, visitors or tourists could park. These cars are often those of residents who do not have private parking, or those of commuters – who are supposed to carpool or leave their vehicles in a park-and-ride station on the outskirts of the city. Thus, current policies are only opposed to automobiles in certain spaces for certain uses, and are only a constraint for those who do not have the resources to be able to afford getting around the rules.

Based on a study of transport policies in the 1990s and 2000s in eight French and Swiss cities, Kaufmann et al. (2007) showed that the way in which parking is restricted has an impact on the segregating effects. Indeed, regulation through prices, as in Zurich, Switzerland, where paid parking is generalized and expensive, leads to clear segregating effects, limiting automobile use for lower social categories, but increasing use among wealthier categories. But, according to these authors, managing parking with free or low-cost parking and limiting parking times, as in Bern, Switzerland, or Strasbourg, France, reduces these segregating effects.

The use of fees to regulate automobile access to cities is now also possible in France with the introduction of urban toll systems¹⁸. But French cities have not yet been able to use this kind of system, except for a few urban infrastructure tolls that were failures (Raux and Souche, 2001). These authors notably studied the case of the TEO toll infrastructure in Lyon, France, and showed that this toll infrastructure had negative effects on various dimensions of territorial and social fairness. These negative effects probably played a role in the population’s opposition to this toll system (boycott of the infrastructure, demonstrations, legal actions) that led to the system’s failure (the toll was mostly eliminated a year after it came into service; all that remains is a short toll section in a tunnel, with a low fare). On a more theoretical level, it should be pointed out that the principle of congestion pricing has been the subject of fundamental criticism linking the development of this notion to that of neoliberal thought (Vanoutrive, 2017). But regulating automobile access to cities can also be based on measures to regulate traffic. On this point, Kaufmann et al. (2007), based on the analysis of the situation in eight French and Swiss cities, observed that when automobile access is restricted in the city centre, the segregating effects (inequality of access) are less when there is a large regional rail transport network (such as in Zurich and Bern in Switzerland). In the French case, few cities have a real rail network on the level of the urban region.

Thus, overall, these different instruments, which have one point in common —the aim of liberating the city of automobile nuisances— often only manage to reduce the visibility of certain categories of drivers in smaller urban perimeters, usually in the central business district or in historical or heritage quarters. Users are carefully sorted, for example, when carrying out a project of underground parking structure —which is supposed to be attractive, accessible and available to visitors-consumers and them alone— or a pedestrianisation project that should accept tourist buses. Sustainable mobility instruments contribute not only to operations for sorting spaces by types of traffic flows that they are supposed to accept, but also, while doing this, operations for sorting uses and users in the city.

¹⁸ Law No. 2010-788 of 12 July 2010 on the national commitment to the environment, JORF No. 0160 of 13 July 2010.

3.4. Governing how areas are used... and sorting users

Revanchist policies?

Operations aimed at the spatial sorting of uses are inseparable from operations aimed at the social sorting of users, and this spatial sorting / social sorting couple is particularly apparent in the most strategic locations in city traffic flows. This social sorting of users seems to be part of a revanchist urban strategy (Smith, 1996).

To be attractive, public transport network hubs must be protected from categories of individuals who could disturb the site's smooth operations, not to mention the city's image. Strategies are put to work to expel the marginalised fringes of the population and disperse them away from train stations (Bonnet, 2012). Moreover, recent evolutions in the design of street furniture found in public spaces attest to an explicit desire by public and private stakeholders to create places that are un hospitable to "bad" users. Spiked designs for public spaces and street furniture, aimed at keeping certain categories of users from extending their stay in these spaces for too long, are being set up throughout the urban landscape, their stated goal being proudly accepted by their initiators and designers (Paté and Argillet, 2005). For example, it is clearly stated in the specifications laid down by the RATP (Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens – Parisian Public Transport Authority) that, in a competitive context between various transport methods, the network's crucial attractiveness entails street furniture designed for travellers and for travellers alone. The same concern for guarding against undesirable individuals such as beggars or vagrants appears in the semantics of urban policies whose goal is to fight against the abusive occupation of public spaces in order to restore a feeling of safety for the neighbouring residents (Rousseau, 2008).

This concept of bringing order to the city is spreading in an ever-growing number of widely varying aspects. The range of resources deployed draws heavily on the combined register of standing, security and urban quality. A *safe city* that is clean, sustainable and compact is becoming the model to be achieved, a response to urban disorder, providing an attractive environment for the middle and upper classes and controlling antisocial behaviours (Helms et al., 2007; Reigner et al., 2009).

In a well-ordered public space, street furniture is designed so that vagrants cannot lie down on benches installed for public transport customers or on window ledges designed for consumers and tourists (Paté and Argillet, 2005). City ordinances define perimeters, often automobile-free neighbourhoods, in which begging and soliciting, wearing baseball caps and skateboard-riding are prohibited. Parking is organised so that commuters' cars do not occupy spaces designed for visitors and consumers. Behaviours are carefully ordered in public spaces by activating, often at the same time, "a myriad of technologies and legal-moral ordering practices" (Coleman, 2005, p. 131).

Policies that are blind to the discriminatory character of automobile access

The social-spatial challenges of urban travel and transport policies, and with them the question of a right to transport and mobility, are the subject of a stimulating theoretical and methodological renewal in recent French-language scientific studies, mainly from the fields of economics, the socioeconomics of transport, geography and urban sociology (Kaufmann, 2001; Mignot and Rosales-Montano, 2006; Montulet and Kaufmann, 2004; Orfeuil, 2004). The prevailing tone in these studies is that mobility as a social issue is the poor relative of contemporary travel and transport policies.

In our contemporary societies, mobility capacities have become a prerequisite for social integration "in the same way as reading, writing or counting" (Orfeuil, 2010, p.6). The average Frenchman, all age groups combined, covers an average of 40 kilometres a day. The average distance per person covered in cars has been multiplied by six in forty years. But situations in which mobility is hard, impossible or very costly are widespread.

Given the long distances covered daily, it is not surprising that, for a large part of the population, the essential challenge is access to an automobile. In other words, whether or not one has access to a car

is the most discriminating factor behind inequalities in terms of travel, and household income is decisive in explaining this unequal access to private cars¹⁹. Households with the lowest-income suffer from non-motorisation, which is highly penalising from the point of view of access to jobs, especially with the growth in part-time work and/or atypical work schedules combined with the rising distance between housing and jobs, which restricts possibilities for access to public transport. Thus, despite the pricing policies and the improvements in public transport services in spaces where social housing is concentrated, the social logic and the spatial logic combine to territorially assign households without cars in a travel system characterised by a dependency on the automobile (Dupuy et al., 2002). By increasing the price of using automobiles and the price of property in the city centre – in a context combining a lack of good public transport on the regional level and a trend of low-income households living in urban “satellites” – contemporary policies do indeed contribute to reinforcing inequality in access to the city depending on one’s profession (Jemelin et al., 2007).

In a context where the semantics of sustainable development are used to legitimise public policies aimed at restraining automobile use, the idea of increasing access to automobile mobility as the most effective way of reducing mobility inequalities is unable to make its way onto national or local policy agendas. And yet conclusive experiments have been carried out in France and elsewhere – emergency assistance (taxi vouchers, repair vouchers), social car rentals or assistance in gaining the right of passage that is the driving license²⁰. Mignot feels that it is time (and it is possible) to move beyond this contradiction between sustainability and automobile access by reinventing “the people’s car” and deploying public policies to assist in purchasing non-polluting cars for low-income households (Mignot, 2008, p. 71).

For other authors (Paulhiac and Kaufmann, 2006, p. 52), the perception of the “importance of the automobile in social integration” and the “desire to reduce its urban uses”, both supported by local stakeholders, comprises a contradiction seen as unsurmountable and which explains the frequent ineffectiveness of policies aimed at reducing the place of the automobile in urban areas of European cities. Paulhiac and Kaufmann, however, consider that some urban areas (not in France) are exceptions and manage to contain automobile use “thanks to a combination of different kinds of restrictions to automobile use (managing parking, tolls, rerouting traffic, reassigning road systems to other uses, etc.) and policies for urban planning and land use management (local urban planning, urban forms of intermediate density, anchoring urban planning around train stations, etc.). Ferrara, Karlsruhe and Munster are good examples of these policies, as are the three Swiss urban areas of Basel, Bern and Zurich” (Paulhiac and Kaufmann, 2006, p. 52). But are these strategies free of segregating effects?

3.5. Uneven treatment of urban space: questioning sustainable mobility?

The aforementioned developments suggest that a spatially and socially selective ordering is under way in French sustainable mobility policies. While this observation justifies a critical view of these policies, it does not entail calling the notion of sustainable mobility itself into question. Other evolutions in mobility, which do not fit in with the sustainable mobility paradigm, also tend to encourage socio-spatial disparities. Some authors insist on the links between automobility and inequalities (Freund, 2014). For example, the “car system” (Dupuy, 2006; Urry, 2008) and the continued increase in automobile use (at a global scale) contribute to the contraction of space by reducing travel times, encouraging the metropolisation process, accentuating the urban hierarchy, and leading to the decline of many small and medium-sized towns, at least in Europe (Pumain, 1998). The processes of socio-spatial segregation in urban spaces are now being exacerbated because “cities have become strategically important arenas in which neoliberalizing forms of creative destruction

¹⁹ The majority of households with incomes less than half the average income do not have cars (55% vs. 23% of the population as a whole), (Claisse et al., 2002).

²⁰ In the United States and the United Kingdom, notably due to a strong dependency on the automobile for the former and an older and greater flexibility of the job market in both cases, policies against social exclusion include a component of assistance for mobility that apply this kind of public action (Mignot, 2008).

have been unfolding” (Peck et al., 2009, p. 57). In this context, certain sustainable mobility measures (trams, car-free town centres, etc.) are also means of contributing to the attractiveness of certain sectors of the city to the detriment of others, and to competition between cities. Thus, in our opinion, the effects of socio-spatial segregation should not be attributed to the principle of sustainable mobility, but rather to evolutions in the modes of urban governance in late capitalism, to use the wording of Harvey (1989). We should also remember that the critical observation reported here, and more generally in this entire article, does not call into question the motivations or competencies of players who are actually taken up in a set of constraints (Koglin and Petterssen, 2017). As Peck et al. (2009, p. 58) pointed out, “most local governments have been constrained, to some degree independently of their political orientation and national context, to adjust to heightened levels of economic uncertainty by engaging in short-termist forms of interspatial competition.”

4. Conclusion

In this article, to put things into a critical perspective, we have presented an overview of recent research on mobility policies planned and implemented in French cities in reference to safe, sustainable mobility goals. This overview notably shows that, in France, public problems in connection with mobility are framed using a moral register emphasising individual responsibility, contributing to a depoliticization of these problems, which has also been observed in other countries (Kębłowski and Bassens, 2018), and which, more generally, could be interpreted in reference to the process of de-democratisation described by authors such as Brown (2006), Crouch (2004) and Swyngedouw (2005). On this subject, it would be desirable to see an evolution of sustainable mobility policies consisting in re-politicizing questions of mobility and transport, as suggested by Kębłowski et al. (2016).

This re-politicization is all the more necessary in that, as can be seen in this overview of recent scientific studies of French cities, given the lack of debates and controversies, transport and sustainable mobility questions are often put into motion as part of strategies for attractiveness and traffic organisation, leading to treatments that are highly differentiated between the different areas of a city. This observation is in part in line with that made by Schwanen (2016) who, on the basis of international literature, noted that social and environmental objectives are often contingent upon considerations of reducing congestion and making optimal use of networks. The strategies implemented in France in the area of transport and mobility also raise socio-spatial issues that are going to become increasingly crucial, which argues in favour of a turnaround in contemporary travel and transport policies in France in favour of a clear expansion of the perimeters of public action, where urban quality and prestigious urban transport infrastructure projects (tram lines, for example) would no longer be the leitmotifs behind public policies serving the city’s attractiveness and increasing real estate values in certain areas.

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