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Santiago's "Plurinational Cycling Revolution" - cycling as a tool for multiple demands

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Visuel

Santiago's "Plurinational Cycling Revolution" - cycling as a tool for multiple demands

Chapô

Cycling movements have multiplied in South America, particularly in Santiago de Chile, where their scope has brought together all kinds of demands: social, feminist and ecological. Matthieu Gillot and Patrick Rérat followed this "plurinational cycling revolution" which brings together several thousand people every week.

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Date de publication

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Présentation longue

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Introduction In Santiago de Chile, a city with 8 million inhabitants, a social crisis erupted in October 2019, prompted by an increase in the price of metro tickets. Students began a fare dodging campaign with the slogan "Evadir, no pagar, otra forma de luchar" ("Evade, don't pay, a different way to fight!"). The ensuing protests more generally called into question several decades of neo-liberal policies and the privatisation of institutions such as education, health or pensions. Cycling collectives joined this protest, calling themselves the "Plurinational Cycling Revolution." Their first rally attracted 35,000 people on October 27, 2019. Since then, except during a period of lockdown, several thousand cyclists have gathered every Sunday (for a total of 88 gatherings at the beginning of December 2021), converging on the city centre.

02-la_revolution_cycliste_plurinationale_de_santiago_ou_le_velo_comme_outil_de_revendicati

Figure 1: Cycling Revolution no. 29 of November 15, 2020 in front of the Presidential Palace (source: Cristián Cuevas Barazarte)

A mobilisation can be defined as “the action by which individuals are called to mobilise and gather in the public space in order to achieve a concerted goal” (Landriève et al. 2017).^[^1] The most well-known cycling mobilisations on an international scale are the Critical Masses (Furness 2010) during which cyclists travelled in large numbers with the slogan “We don’t block the traffic, we are the traffic” (White 1999). Born in San Francisco in 1992, this movement has spread throughout the world. In Santiago, the Movimiento furiosos ciclistas (“Furious Cyclist Movement”) launched the “Cicletada de primer martes” in 1995, based on this model. The Plurinational Cycling Revolution takes the principles of the Critical Masses, but distinguishes itself through demands that go beyond the realm of cycling and into different political arenas. Our premise is that this convergence of demands is an emblematic expression of the concept of mobility justice, developed by sociologist Mimi Sheller. For Mimi Sheller,^[^2] the right to mobility is a freedom that must be won. Many restrictions in this area generate significant disparities and inequalities and, without mobility, there are no relational processes. The notion of mobility justice allows us to think of a triple crisis operating at several scales (from the body to the street, the city, the nation, and to the whole planet) and that refers to different forms of mobility. More specifically, these are: (1) the urban crisis (inequalities in access to transport and amenities), (2) the environmental or climate crisis (CO2 emissions, etc.) and (3) the migration crisis (population movements to escape, among other things, the effects of climate change). This notion should allow us to build bridges between different approaches and debates about the different spatial mobilities and to bring them together into an overarching discussion on how to rethink lifestyles and the transition to low-carbon mobility. We analysed the Plurinational Cycling Revolution of Santiago from October 2019 (beginning of the social crisis) to October 2020 (referendum on the constitution proposed by the government). In the first months, through participant observation during demonstrations and meetings, as well as through interviews (with the RPC’s spokesperson on social networks, the director of a pro-cycling organization, an activist member of several cycling NGOs and a feminist cycling activist), we were able to collect information on the various messages and slogans. During the pandemic, we followed the mobilisations via social networks. We compiled and analysed an inventory of the materials used (flyers, slogans, etc.) by visual methods (Rose 2016). This article gives an overview of the main cycling,

political, environmental and feminist demands. ## The demands of the Plurinational Cycling Revolution Just like the Critical Masses, a first series of demands concerned the place of cyclists and their right to the city. The Plurinational Cycling Revolution appeared in a context where cycling is growing, particularly in connection with the social crisis and the metro's shutdown. Bikes are an alternative to the automobile in a congested city where cars remain a symbol of social success. The cyclists' demands are directed at the scale of their bodies (safety, integrity) but also at the scale of the city of Santiago (accessibility), referring to the need for adequate infrastructure for utility cycling (beyond "recreational bike paths") and its legitimacy as a means of transport. The health crisis favours the practice of cycling because of the need to respect social distancing. This is reflected in some slogans like "More bike lanes, less contagion." However, informal workers (1/3 of the working population) living on the outskirts can't access the new cycle paths and have to contend in particular with a lack of secure parking near public transport stations (Jirón 2020). During this period, cycling collectives organised repair workshops, brought essential goods and organised "ollas comunes" (soup kitchens) in poor neighbourhoods. In September 2020, during the lockdown, numerous fatal accidents involving cyclists were caused by speeding motorists and bus drivers in a less-congested city. After a break from March to September 2020, cyclists took to the streets again with the slogan "No + cyclistas muertxs" ("No more dead cyclists") (Figure 2). The movement's demands, however, went beyond cycling activism, as shown by the other two slogans of the flyer: "I approve"(Apruebo; in reference to the referendum on the Constitution) and "Dignity, the planet, your future."

03-la_revolution_cycliste_plurinationale_de_santiago_ou_le_velo_comme_outil_de_revendicati

Figure 2: Flyer of the Cycling Revolution of October 11, 2020

The initial slogan of high school students ("Evade, don't pay, a different way to fight!") was adapted by the cycling collectives into: Evade, pedal, a different way to fight! During their rallies, cyclist collectives also voiced the political demands of demonstrations taking place throughout Chile: demands for a new Constitution, calls for the resignation of government officials, and in general, a rejection of the privatisation of essential institutions (education, health, pensions). The Mapuche flag, representing the country's indigenous population that isn't recognised in the Constitution, was present during demonstrations (Figure 3). The term "plurinational,"

<div class="logo logo-mobile"> . Landriève, Sylvie, Villeneuve Dominic, Kaufmann Vincent and Christophe Gay (2017), "Mobilization", Mobile Lives Forum. Accessed May 12, 2021, URL: [Mundler, Marie, and Patrick Rérat. 2018. "Le vélo comme outil d'empowerment. Les impacts des cours de vélo pour adultes sur les pratiques socio-spatiales" \[Cycling as an empowerment tool. The impacts of adult cycling lessons on socio-spatial practices.\] Cahiers scientifiques du transport, No. 73: 139-60.](#) Rose, Gillian. 2016. Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials. Salazar, Myriam. 2019. "Tiempos de transformación" [Times of transformation], Revista Pedalea (blog). December 5, 2019. Sheller, Mimi. 2018. Mobility justice: the politics of movement in the age of extremes. London; Brooklyn, NY: Back. Sheller, Mimi (2019), "From the street to the planet: can mobility justice unite our diverse struggles?", Mobile Lives Forum. Accessed May 12, 2021, URL: [White, Ted. 1999. WE ARE TRAFFIC!: A Movie About Critical Mass. . \[^1\]: While our topic is cycling mobilisations \(see also Manga Tinoco; \), other movements were also motivated by mobility issues, such as the "smile revolution" in Algeria \(\) or the yellow vests in France \(\). \[^2\]:](#)

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Chapô

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