

Special issue of *Flux*

New challenges for rural mobilities

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Today, many actors (political, institutional, social...) are questioning the way we get around on a daily basis. In their sights, public authorities point to the omnipresence of the automobile, not only for safety reasons, but now also for environmental ones (Demoli, 2015). These new perspectives make inequalities in daily travel patterns and problems more visible, on two levels: socially (Cholez *et alii.*, 2005) and spatially. While major conurbations have a wide range of alternatives (metro, bus, streetcar, car rental) and an infrastructure that is increasingly designed to encourage active mobility (pedestrian areas, cycle paths, etc.), areas far from major cities still have to deal with a public transport offer that is generally less extensive, or even non-existent. As a result, access to individual modes of transport (two-wheelers and cars) is essential in rural areas, so much so that it conditions access to the most essential resources of daily life. In particular, the car enables people to build up a social network, control their personal time and access employment (Kaufmann, Mangin, Marchal, 2024). In so doing, its use unlocks access to many areas of socialization. Because in rural areas, the car is generally indispensable, it is not always a choice (Flipo, 2021). Here, access to mobility (in its broadest sense) is closely linked to social status (Baylina, Rodó-Zárate, 2020), even more so than in urban areas. At a time when this means of transport, once favoured by rural dwellers (*Ibid.*), is now devalued in political discourse promoting a modal shift, it becomes necessary to rethink its place and the prospects open to it within low-density areas.

This thematic issue aims to treat the rural question by avoiding an urbanocentric and folkloric reading (Orange, Vignon, 2019). It aims to develop a plural reading of spaces far from major urban centers. Indeed, it seems necessary to adopt a reading of the rural object (and of those who occupy it) as far from a binary conception as possible, considering that rurality is neither an extension of the city, nor a world that would be separate from it. The symbolic dichotomy between rurality and urbanity is not as solid as the power of words would have us believe, at least in terms of mobility (Lambert, Roudet, 1995), not least because the relationship with proximity is, in reality, largely subjective, but also because urban and rural are largely porous. In this respect, many rural and semi-urban dwellers combine their experiences and have no difficulty making trips back and forth to urban areas. What's more, the concept of rurality does not cover the same issues or the same realities, depending on whether we look at countries in the North or South.

While there is currently a great deal of interest in research into urban mobility, it has to be said that these issues remain a blind spot when it comes to rural territories. This may come as a surprise. The French territory is characterized by a multitude of small rural communes, linked by a particularly dense road network (Marchal, Stébé, 2019, 2010). At the same time, European

urbanization is affecting a large proportion of rural areas, with a wide variety of typologies. These areas are experiencing contrasting demographic dynamics, ranging from steady growth to significant decline. Finally, these areas continue to face major challenges in terms of isolation, a major factor in socio-economic inequalities. This problem is all the more acute in southern countries, where infrastructure is sometimes lacking (Porter, 2002).

This issue of *Flux* invites us to examine the mobility issues facing rural communities today. More specifically, it sheds light on the particularities that characterize rural territories in terms of travel, but also the difficulties encountered by the populations that populate them and the forms of ingenuity (individual, collective, informal, institutional, technical, project-based, etc.) that develop there. In this way, and in a non-exhaustive way, contributions may fall under one or more of the following headings:

1/ The modalities of public innovation in rural areas. This line of research examines the role of institutions (regional, departmental, municipal, etc.) and the place of public action in the broad sense (Lascoumes, Le Galès, 2018) in the organization of local mobility services and/or spatial planning related to mobility. How are local authorities addressing the issues inherent in mobility, from the most traditional and ordinary (school pick-ups, public transport, etc.) to the most specific problems (congestion effects due to detour induced by connected navigation services, for example), or confronting long-term prospective scenarios? Contributions can also look at how large-scale political decisions are translated locally. For example, in the case of France, what are the concrete effects of the 2019 Mobility Orientation Law (LOM) on low-density territories, or of the introduction of ZFEs (Low Emission Zones) on the mobility of rural populations? In the countries of the South, what impact do the sustainable mobility plans deployed in major metropolises, such as Bogotá (Thomas, Gouëset, 2023), have on their less urbanized peripheries, particularly when the collective mobility offer is undersized, as is the case for the city of Dakar (Lesteven *et alii*, 2023)? In Switzerland, how are the *Projet de territoire's* (Territory Project's) mobility, energy and production strategies adapted to regional and rural planning policies? Far from representing a homogeneous reality, rural territories represent a mosaic of differentiated situations, from a social, spatial and cultural point of view. In this sense, they can just as easily be fertile environments crossed by dynamic citizen, political, cultural and associative initiatives, as situations where the issue of electing a mayor - a central figure of rurality if ever there was one - represents the primary concern. So, how does the diversity of local political configurations influence the concrete possibilities of constructing modalities of access to resources and amenities? How do different forms of political commitment influence local political dynamics around mobility? What scope for innovation and experimentation really exists in municipalities on the bangs of, or excluded from, metropolitan or conurbation planning? More broadly, attention could be paid to the unforeseen effects, or even the induced effects, of public policies, in order to question in particular the existence of a circularity between the latter and local lifestyles. What citizen initiatives are emerging in today's rural world in terms of mobility? How do citizens' initiatives use legislative and institutional instruments? Are they taken up by public authorities, and if so, how? What do they reveal about people's attachment to the areas where they live? What aspirations for change are expressed? How is modal shift organized collectively, both within public authorities and outside them, notably within associations? And how does the goal of decarbonizing mobility involve new players and new types of interaction? Proposals could focus on the development of alternative private-initiative offerings, which aim to meet a demand for mobility that is not being met and is thus apprehended as a potential market - rental of different types of vehicles,

shuttles and other short-, medium- or long-distance public transport in particular - as well as local debates on a car-free future (Cogato Lanza *et alii*, 2021).

2/ The diversity of daily mobility practices and experiences beyond the car. Rural life is often marked by the remoteness and spatial fragmentation of a number of resources that are essential to access (workplaces, food supplies, health services, administrative services, etc.). For this reason, rural areas are often likened to an inescapable dependence on the automobile, the possession of which can make people dependent on more urbanized areas outside the region (think, for example, of the difficulty of finding a garage and sometimes even a gas station without having to travel dozens of kilometers). And yet, on closer inspection, a certain number of people living in rural areas are not (or no longer) motorized. This may be due to economic constraints or a lack of mobility skills (Kaufmann, 2008), for example. These situations give rise to a range of resourceful practices, consisting of "making do", but above all "making do without" (De Certeau, 1990). This means resorting to modal shifting and solidarity, as well as developing ordinary skills to circumvent the need for mobility through practices of sobriety or autonomy (Mangin, Roy, 2023). How, then, are rural "non-car" mobilities organized? What other forms of mobility do they suggest? On what (re)organization of daily life are they based, and how are they experienced by those who implement them? Case studies located in sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of journeys are made on foot (Diaz Olvera, *et alii*, 2010; Boyer, Gouëset, Delaunay, 2016), would be particularly instructive here. In other cases, demotorization is the result of fully chosen and assumed lifestyles that give primacy to practices of mutual aid (running errands for a neighbor in exchange for a service), solidarity (carpooling, hitchhiking) and mutualization (to run errands or go into town). This is particularly true of neo-ruralites, whose professional activities can be totally or partially carried out by telecommuting. How can we account for the commitment to such forms of mobility, *a priori* ill-suited to the areas in which they are deployed? If, as elsewhere, the car retains a central place in the lifestyles of individuals as much as in the organization of the territory (Héran, 2020), how is the imperative of thinking about its cohabitation with other modes of transport deployed and imposed? (Peycheraud, 2022). For example, while new forms of mobility are multiplying in central urban areas, supported by the diversification of transport modes (Mangin, Vincent, Marchal, 2023), what about scooters, electrified bicycles and pedibuses in less densely populated areas? Finally, work could be done on the digitization of consumer practices and their impact on mobility. For example, while we already know that car-dependent urban and peri-urban households have differentiated uses of online purchasing (Belton-Chevalier, De Coninck, Motte-Baumvol, 2016), articles on the specificity of access to goods and services by rural populations (via roaming or the development of home delivery in particular) will be welcome. How have supply-related mobility practices changed, or not, as a result of the development of home delivery services, particularly during the Covid-19 period? What demand does this meet? Do these offers help to limit the ecological footprint of travel, insofar as everyone needs to be able to get to dedicated delivery points? Finally, what is the impact of digital technology on rural populations, their mobility, their consumption patterns and, more broadly, their lifestyles?

3/ Mobility issues through the lens of populations. This theme focuses on the diversity of rural populations and the issues related to their cohabitation. Residents can be approached based on their age, gender, social category, or geographical origin. Contributions may address, among other things, the determinants of mobility barriers and their consequences for aging populations in rural areas. How do older people get around? How do they experience any restrictions on their travel? At the other end of the age pyramid, attention may be paid to the characteristics of children's and adolescents' mobility and their place in local social life (think, for example, of small groups of young people gathering around their bicycles or mopeds). How and where do

young people get around? What do the different modes of transport represent for rural youth? These questions are at the heart of contemporary issues, especially given the importance of mobility in the analysis of socio-spatial inequalities affecting young people (Rénahy, 2010; Amsellem-Mainguy, 2021). Work on the mobility practices of secondary residents (Duchêne-Lacroix, Hilti, Schad, 2013) as well as commuters and cross-border workers (Clément et al., 2024) and their relationships with the local population will also be appreciated. What do these patterns of mobility and partial habitation over time say about the way in which certain people invest in rural areas? What kind of roots do such ways of living reflect? More generally, what links can be established between daily mobility and residential mobility? What economies does the rural area actually support, particularly in relation to the spread of teleworking and new forms of shared mobility?

4/ Mobility infrastructure in rural areas. This theme proposes to examine individuals' relationships with mobility infrastructure. While roads, bike paths, and repair facilities are essential for the use of various vehicles, political decisions in this area reflect priorities that should be analyzed. For example, who and what are the bike paths that are multiplying in tourist-heavy areas intended for? More broadly, which forms of mobility and which populations are favored or disadvantaged by existing and future infrastructure? What do the priorities given to the maintenance of certain infrastructure (Denis, Florentin, 2022), sometimes to the detriment of others, reflect? How is the issue of infrastructure costs addressed, whether related to construction or maintenance? What criteria, if any, are used to balance infrastructure costs, environmental costs, and health costs? Here, it might be worth looking at infrastructure deficits and difficulties in accessing infrastructure. How do people manage to access the tools and skills needed for maintenance when there is no mechanic nearby? What forms of organization can compensate for the lack of a gas station? More broadly, what forms of solidarity can compensate for the lack of public institutions and economic actors dedicated to mobility? Beyond the construction of road infrastructure, how can access to mobility be provided to populations in southern countries (Dawson and Barwell, 1993)? Contributions may also shed light on social and territorial inequalities in access to infrastructure (gas stations, garages, highway access, etc.). Beyond their absence, they may also question coexistence with infrastructure and its potential for nuisance. For example, how do individuals deal with the noise, smell, and visual disturbances caused by a highway, a winding road frequented by motorcyclists, or a race track (Marchal, 2022)? What symbolic boundaries can such infrastructure represent, given that it is sometimes used almost exclusively by urban tourists who are unfamiliar with the area? Finally, we will consider modal coexistence and the potential for multimodality. Rural areas are particularly popular with those who come to enjoy recreational, non-motorized forms of mobility (such as cycling or contemplative, meditative walking, which allows them to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life for a while (Le Breton, 2012)). The paradox here lies in the embedded nature of these so-called “soft” forms of mobility within other forms of mobility, often motorized, which are used to travel to places dedicated to such practices. What needs do these recreational forms of mobility, and more broadly these alternative forms of mobility, meet? Who uses them? Are they embraced by local populations? How do they experience such forms of mobility, which could be described as heteronomous? These questions lead to an extension of the concept of mobility infrastructure to all spaces dedicated to it, including individual garages, collective parking lots, residential building courtyards, and other maneuvering spaces. What weak signals can be detected in uses and DIY projects that reveal transition tactics (reallocation, sharing, etc.)? What applications of urban planning regulations—for example, in terms of parking space—reveal tensions between traffic management expectations and real estate sustainability objectives? What uncertainties or reversibilities can be observed in mobility spaces in rural areas?

Since the concept of rurality refers to a variety of social, cultural, and territorial situations, articles may focus on villages located far from urban centers as well as on areas closer to cities that constitute their pre-urbanized periphery. They may also focus on denser areas considered urbanized, insofar as they examine their links with rurality. Furthermore, although this call for papers is written with the French context in mind, contributions may focus on case studies from other areas.

As the journal *Flux* is open to multidisciplinary, the selected texts may fall within the fields of sociology, anthropology, geography, economics, history, philosophy, political science, urban planning, and/or at the crossroads of these disciplines.

Information for authors:

Deadline for abstracts: **December 15, 2025.**

Submission of article proposals (in the form of abstracts, maximum 4,000 characters, including the authors' names and institutional affiliations)

Deadline for full articles (first draft): **September 7, 2026**

Based on abstracts pre-approved by the editorial board of *Flux*, authors will have until September 7, 2026 to submit the full version of their article. These articles must comply with the journal's standards (see note to authors), namely a text of no more than 50,000 characters (including spaces), an abstract of 1,000 to 1,500 characters in French and English, and a biographical note of approximately 600 characters.

For more information about the journal *Flux* and the guide for authors, please visit: <https://revue-flux.cairn.info/recommandations-aux-auteurs/>

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