

World mobility trends: what place for the bicycle?

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Giving a picture of trips worldwide is a challenge. My poster presents a tentative overview of global mobility circa 1990. Recording historical travel should avoid technological anecdotes and concentrate on behaviours better than "Once, people essentially walked about one hour per day ". It is a lifetime historian's labour. Forecasting future travel demands a thorough understanding of the past, a complete analysis of the car culture that dominates the more advanced countries, a profound awareness of the limits of the world economy on a finite planet, and an acute intuition of possible breaks in trends.

What is then the historical and future role of the bicycle?

The bicycle has been a pre-motorization vehicle, that has culminated in China in 1995. Everywhere, motorized vehicles have wiped out cyclists, as it now occurs in South-East Asia. In some of the more developed countries, such as Northern Europe or Japan, the bicycle has regained a comfortable share. In other developed countries, it is still only a sport item or a child toy. The bicycle could handle the entire present world mobility (15 kilometres per person per day), if it were uniformly distributed. But world inequalities enables the happy few to fly around the world, the wealthy countries mass and the developing countries elite to clog up the streets with their cars, and the African woman is still walking for water. The bicycle could help solving the global environmental issues. But will the industrial and commercial stakes allow a key or marginal role for the bicycle?