

INTERVIEW



Véronique Langlois and Xavier Charpentier, co-founders of Free Thinking

The quest for independence often still involves access to a car

A study of young people - why now?

Véronique Langlois: As we left the acute phase of Covid behind us, we knew that young people had often been the most heavily impacted, and also that French society was undergoing a form of "archipelagoisation". Young people who were often hit harder than their parents by being locked down in small spaces, confinement, solitude and the end of social interaction, the impossibility of studying normally and looking for work... It was important to see how they were doing in this society of heightened tension at this very specific time.

What do you think the study revealed above all?

Xavier Charpentier: That apart from what unites them, young people in France are now, perhaps more than anything else, diverse in terms of political and social engagement and the

feeling of being in control of their lives. For example, on one side there are the young people we have called "the withdrawn", often from small towns or the countryside, with little engagement and few qualifications, for whom Covid amplified difficulties that were already long-standing, and on the other, young people in smaller cities, often girls, often with middle class parents, politically and socially engaged and confident in their ability to bring about environmental change... And between these two extremes, other groups constituting a real youth archipelago.

What surprised you?

V.L.: The constraints on young people's mobility as soon as you move away from the big cities, where they see mobility as fluid. And their desire to pass the driving test, which remains massive. Even though they are very environmentally aware, and many of them want to take concrete action, the quest for independence often still involves access to a car.

Will young people adopt public transport? On what conditions?

X.C.: Yes, of course, fortunately! Cars remain a source of emancipation and physical freedom, but the vast majority of young people see public transport as the solution, now and in the future, when it comes to the environment and purchasing power, even if it is challenging. But on two conditions. One is central for the most vulnerable, people living far from cities and facing the greatest difficulties: affordability, even after 25, which is a key age at which people often switch to using a car. The other is also very important: physical accessibility, the capacity to offer a fluid service in areas that are currently isolated or cut off. And for passengers living on the edges of cities, a level of security, cleanliness and quality that will reassure them. ■

KEO
SCOPIE FLASH

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The youth archipelago

While the media paint a picture of young people as the leaders of societal transformations taking place now and in the future, the panorama of people aged 18 to 30 is actually more varied than you might think.

The analysis of French youth in 2022* reveals many kinds of young person, each with their own aspirations, lifestyles and expectations. They have much in common, but their levels of engagement with society, control over their own lives and priorities mark them out from one another.

While freedom of movement remains a fundamental aspiration for young people, more than half of them live outside the major cities in Île-de-France and the rest of the country, and thus have to rely on having a driving licence and a car. Cycling and walking also help to fill the gap. But though public transport appears to be a disappointment, all is not lost: it is still



35%
OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE AGE RANGE ARE NOT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

40%
OF YOUNG MEN HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE, COMPARED WITH 16% OF YOUNG WOMEN

considered the best way of making future mobility sustainable, and has a better image than the car - even the electric car. "Mobility packages" are more important than ever in convincing many young people to fully adopt a combination of walking, cycling and public transport. ■

*Source: Keoscope study conducted in the first half of 2022 in partnership with Free Thinking.

COMMON FEATURES

73%
dream of owning a detached house

79%
think action against global warming is urgently needed

TOP 5 PRIORITIES

(3 choices possible)

- 1 • Health
- 2 • Purchasing power
- 3 • Poverty
- 4 • Environment
- 2 • Discrimination

Youth diversity, a long way from the media clichés

- ① **Great resilience, but not for everyone.** The impact of Covid seems to have been digested, and is sometimes even positive: two thirds of young people say they gained at least one benefit from the period. Even when it comes to socialising, the negative impact of Covid is no higher than 50%. ■
- ② **The growing temptation to focus on a close private circle, a kind of “cocoon”** where they feel in control of their lives. Staying at home is the favoured option for 65% of young people, while 58% choose to go out to see friends or family, and only 22% prefer going out to party (up to two answers accepted). ■
- ③ **Stability for some and the wide blue yonder for others.** In terms of life priorities, young people seem to be divided into those who prefer “traditional” values (starting a family, owning a home and having a stable job) and those who prefer the “wide blue yonder” (travel, exploring the world, living abroad etc.). Similar numbers of young people prioritise finding a stable job to those who want to start their own business. ■

- ④ **Activism in moderation.** Young people in France are far from being born militants... Given three choices for their priorities in life, only around 10% say they want to get involved with a voluntary organisation or political party, despite their high level of awareness of issues such as the environment. ■
- ⑤ **Diminishing attractiveness of Ile-de-France.** While half of young people living in Ile-de-France, the Paris region, see themselves staying there in the future, 70% of those living in smaller cities, towns and villages want to remain where they are. Only 6% of young people outside Ile-de-France plan to move there. ■
- ⑥ **Young people at home with digital technology,** but more for gaming and listening to music than for useful everyday services. Few are trying to limit their digital footprint. However, they are increasingly sensitive about their personal data. Around 60% reject geolocation, for example, even when travelling. ■
- ⑦ **Responsible mobility, yes, but autonomy above all – see opposite.** ■

PORTRAITS OF YOUTH



After two years of pandemic, in a context of heightened tension, young people are still young people – idealistic in outlook, whatever their age. But if we dig a little further, not all young people feel equally in control of their lives.

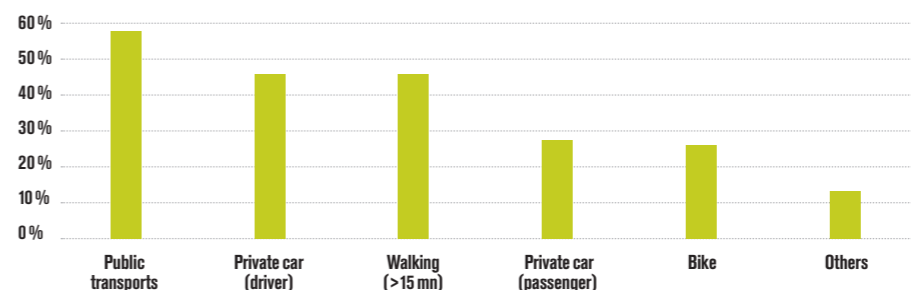
We can identify six broad profiles of young people, widely dispersed in terms of control over their lives and political and social engagement.

The driving licence - an essential passport to freedom

Most young people want to secure their independence above all, which (still) means a car. Driving licences are highly sought-after. The rate of possession of a driving licence has risen steadily since the 1970s, though people have tended to pass their test later and later. In terms of intention to get a licence,

city-dwellers are no different from their rural counterparts: over 90% of young people have a licence or aim to get one. On the other hand, cars are starting to lose their shine (55% positive image) compared with active transport (81%) and public transport (67% for buses). ■

Modes of transportation used daily

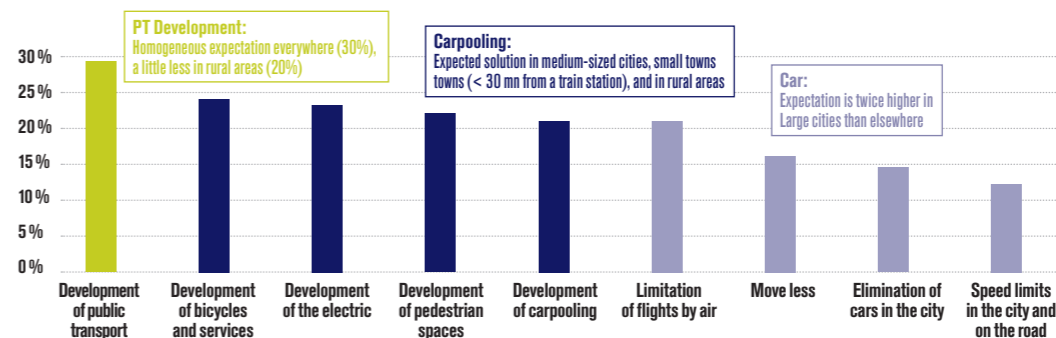


A pragmatic view of mobility

All the modes receive a positive evaluation, depending on the purpose, location and occasion. **The use of the car is a conscious choice.** Cars offer greater privacy and security (distance from crowds, hygiene, antisocial behaviour etc.).

Active transport, meanwhile, is associated with images of progress and seen as a virtuous model (for the environment, health and the wallet), but one that is only available to certain “privileged” people. ■

Top priorities of young people to make tomorrow's mobility sustainable



Public transport emerges as synonymous with sustainable, responsible mobility, but the psychological overhead is seen as too high (insecurity, timetable constraints, unpredictability etc.) and accessibility is inadequate (price, journey time etc.). Imperfections or shortcomings are identified by those who have little to no access (people living far from cities) and the people with the most experience of public transport (city-dwellers aged 25 to 30).

When it comes to making future mobility sustainable, young people's priorities include developing provision of public transport and making it more affordable. The basics of service quality need to be secured more than ever before: legible transport provision, frequent availability, regularity, comfort, scale, suitability for young people's lifestyles – and not just for getting them to college! ■

FOR INFO

1/4
of young people declare that a car is essential for their daily life

85%
of young people in Paris do not have their own vehicle
The figure is between 5 and 15% in peri-urban and rural areas

GENDER GAP

15%
more young men than women cycle daily (33% compared with 18%)

9%
more young women than men drive daily