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The Plurinational Cycling Revolution in Santiago de Chile: Demands for mobility justice

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ABSTRACT

The Plurinational Cycling Revolution in Santiago de Chile is a social movement that brings together cyclists in large numbers. Using the prism of mobility justice, we identify and analyse four ranges of demands of the Plurinational Cycling Revolution. It first calls for recognition of cycling as a mode of transport in its own right. It is also a vehicle for political, environmental and feminist demands and participates in the protest that has resonated across Chile since October 2019. We show that these demands relate to several crises of mobility. They highlight inequalities in the ability to move in the city according to social class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin or mode of transport. They critique the structures – the political system, neoliberalism, the patriarchy or the automobile system – that perpetuate these inequalities and crises of mobility. The bicycle appears to be a resilient mode of transport in the context of the crises experienced by Chile and its capital. By focusing a multiplicity of demands, it is used as a vector for systemic change in Chilean society.

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1. Introduction

On 27 October 2019, thousands of cyclists flocked to Baquedano Square in Santiago de Chile. One week after the start of the *Estallido Social*, the Chilean social crisis, this symbolic place bore the scars of the struggle between demonstrators and the forces of order. Amidst the debris from projectiles and stripped pavements, two cyclists unfolded a banner. Against the background of the Chilean flag, it read *Revolución Ciclista Nacional*, topped with the logo of a bicycle. This first national cycling revolution, which was later renamed plurinational cycling revolution (*Revolución Ciclista Plurinacional*; hereafter RCP), was followed by many other demonstrations.

The best-known cycling mobilisation is "Critical Mass", which sees cyclists come together to ride in large numbers, usually on the last Friday of the month, to demand their "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1974). The movement originated in San Francisco in 1992 and spread throughout the world under the slogan "We don't block traffic, we are traffic" (White, 1999). The literature on cycling movements is still scarce both on Critical Mass

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(with some notable exceptions such as Furness (2007; 2010) or LaFrambois (2018) for the United States) and more specifically on Latin America (Castañeda 2020)).

Like Critical Mass, the RCP brings together large numbers of cyclists who take to the streets and participate in cycling activism. It is both a symbolic and practical taking of space from the car. The RCP, however, is much broader as it forms part of a general protest movement that has permeated Chilean society since autumn 2019.

This paper is based on field observations (routes, slogans, etc.), visual materials (flyers) and interviews. It identifies four claims of the RCP – cyclist, political, environmental, feminist – and analyses them mobilizing Mimi Sheller's (2018) work on mobility justice. The concept of mobility justice allows us to link various issues related to mobility, mobility inequalities and the types of actors seeking social change. Our analysis shows that the RCP's demands relate to crises of mobility, inequalities in the ability to move in the city according to social class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin or mode of transport. The RCP critique the structures – the political system, neoliberalism, the patriarchy or the automobile system – that perpetuate these inequalities and crises of mobility. The paper finally discusses how the bicycle is used as a vector for systemic change within the context of contemporary Chilean society.

2. Theoretical discussion

2.1. Mobility justice and social movements

Mimi Sheller (2018) bases the concept of mobility justice on the idea that movement and the ability to control it are fundamental. Sheller posits that, without mobility, there are no relational processes and therefore no beings and space. Sheller identifies a triple crisis operating on multiple levels – from the body to the planet via the street, the city, the nation – and relating to different forms of mobility: the urban crisis (inequalities of access to transport and amenities), the environmental crisis (pollution, CO_2 emissions, etc.) and the migratory crisis (strengthening of borders, refugee movements to climate disruption, etc.). Mobility justice encourages "thinking about how power and inequality influence the governance and control of movement, shaping patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the movement of people, resources and information" (Sheller 2018, 14). Mobility justice can be linked to the concept of social movements as they struggle for greater justice.

For Manuel Castells (1983, 1986), an influential theorist in the study of social movements, these are distinguished by their "bottom-up" structure, non-hierarchical organization, distance from or non-involvement in traditional politics, and emphasis on direct action and protest. He identifies three types of objective among social movements. First is collective consumption, where groups demand that the state provide housing, improve infrastructure or ensure the quality of urban space or accessibility of services. As we discuss below, this is the case with Critical Mass, which demands an end to the domination of the car and the reappropriation of streets by cyclists, pedestrians and residents. Second are movements in defence of territorial identity, such as those that protest against urban regeneration and gentrification. The third objective is the defence of citizens' rights including, for example, movements for the emancipation of minorities or protests against

globalization and restrictive immigration policies. For Castells, the city plays an important role as a central gathering place and as a stage for protest activities.

There is a long tradition of social protest movements in Latin America. From the 1970s onwards, and especially since the 1980s, there have been massive waves of protests by protagonists who did not previously have a significant presence within the social and political scene (Murga Frassinetti 2006). In their early stages, these movements emerged in poor neighbourhoods, focusing on the spheres of consumption and reproduction. These are described by Castells (1986) as urban social movements. In a second phase, the movements challenged military regimes and demanded a new democratic order. The most visible were those championing women, human rights, youth, city dwellers, the ecclesiastical base, regional, ethnic, peasant, environmentalist and gay rights movements, etc. (Murga Frassinetti 2006). The construction of urban highways (Stamm 2017; Sagaris 2019) is emblematic of post-dictatorship citizen mobilisations in Chile. *Ciudad Viva*, for example, played a major role in this struggle by supporting residents in protesting against violations of their right to live in a healthy environment. It also initiated the first campaigns to promote cycling in the late 1990s. Movements by cyclists to claim their right to urban space are a relatively recent phenomenon in Latin America, although the precursors include the *Movimiento Furiosos Ciclistas* (Furious Cyclists' Movement), which has been active in Santiago since 1995 (see below).

2.2. Cycling movements

Cycling as a mode of transport and recreational activity spread widely in the first half of the 20th century, at least in the global North (Héran 2005). The bicycle has long been used as a tool for protest, raising awareness around and expressing social and political causes, although cycling is not always political. The extent to which it can be seen as political depends on the context, the social norms around cycling, and the economic structures in which mobility is locally embedded (Cox 2015, 175). Different cultures attach very different meanings to similar objects, and these meanings may also vary over time. Horton (2006a, 2006b), for example, analyses the role of the bicycle in the oppositional cultures of four British social movements – feminism, socialism, anarchism and environmentalism – and looks at how it has been both a symbolic object of political discourse and a practical object used as a mode of transport by activists in their everyday lives.

The bicycle enabled an expansion of the geographical, social and political horizons of both feminists and socialists at the turn of the 20th century (Horton 2006a, 2006b). Cycling was originally seen mainly as a leisure pursuit for rich men, and was perceived as dangerous and uncomfortable. The invention of the "safety bicycle", coupled with mass production (and falling prices) made it available to a large section of the population. Cycling was endorsed by feminist movements and became symbolic of women's push for greater freedom, playing a role in female emancipation as it offered increased mobility and autonomy outside the private sphere and a reimagining of acceptable dress standards (Mundler and Rérat 2018). Bicycles were also endorsed by certain British socialist movements, as they helped expand the geographical, social and political horizons of the working classes (getting to work, escaping unhealthy industrial cities, etc.) (Horton 2006a). However, as bicycles became more commonplace, they lost all connotations of resistance.

With the rise of the car and mass motorization after the Second World War, city and transport planning models prioritized space for car traffic and marginalized other modes of travel. Bicycle use dropped drastically, and bicycles started to be associated with negative concepts (danger, low speeds, poverty, etc.) (Oldenziel et al. 2016). The street – previously a social hub, meeting place and melting pot where different modes of transport could coexist – gave way to the road, an artery where car traffic had to be able to flow uninterrupted (Koglin and Rye 2014). The car became the dominant system in terms of road occupation, social norms and political priorities (Urry 2004).

In the 1960s, cycling assumed a new meaning in many Western countries, associated with anarchism and, in particular, environmentalism. *Provo* was one of the first post-war cycling movements. Provo "White Bicycle Plan" advocated anarchism, ecology and anti-imperialism, and led to the free provision of bicycles throughout Amsterdam. Anarchism incorporates cycling into contentious urban politics, representing it as a tool for protest and opposition. However, the bicycle is not as central to anarchism as it is to environmentalism, being both an object of environmental discourse (or green culture at the collective level) and an object used in everyday life (or a green lifestyle at the individual level) (Horton 2006b).

Environmental movements began in earnest to highlight the importance of cycling as of the 1970s, a decade marked by the emergence of environmental awareness and the first oil crisis. A convergence between cycling demands and environmental struggles was then observed: the bicycle as a mode of travel became a symbol of frugality, a far cry from the excesses of consumerist society and the dominance of car culture. This is seen in the writings of Illich, who both advocates cycling and condemns car use (Illich 1973). Cycling plays an important part in embodied everyday ecological praxis. The bicycle prefigures the desired, ecologically sustainable society (Horton 2006a, 12). It has become the green mode of mobility *par excellence* and an embodied critique of the car.

In both anarchism and environmentalism, cycling represents a critique of excessive mobility both in terms of pace and space. It "both symbolizes and produces a desired compression of everyday life, fitting an expressive politics concerned with authenticity, community, and elevation of the local" (Horton 2006a, 1).[1]

It should be noted that cycling activism encompasses a wide variety of advocacy. Different visions coexist despite competing beliefs, ideological bases and often very different models of action. Using Lofland's framework on how social change happens, Cox (2015, 184–185ibid.) identifies six (non-exclusive) models of change adopted by cycling advocates: contagion (requesting infrastructures), education (providing training in cycling skills), innovation (introducing new technologies such as bicycle sharing schemes), institutional (lobbying and policy formulation; e.g. Rérat and Ravalet 2022), protests (such as Critical Mass), and prefigurative initiatives (such as Bike Kitchens that are community-run repair workshops). As addressing the full range of cycling advocacy movements is not within the scope of this paper, and we will focus on Critical Mass.

Critical Mass bike rides can be seen as an articulation of the anarchist and environmentalist vision. They began in 1992 in San Francisco as a monthly rush-hour bike ride to increase the visibility of cycling (Carlsson 2002; Carlsson, Elliott, and Camarena 2012). The movement started life as the "Commute Clot" and was renamed after an excerpt in Ted White's documentary "Return of the Scorcher", which shows cyclists in China pushing through intersections once a "critical mass" is reached (White, 1999). Critical Mass has

spread to many countries and cities around the world with the same message to the public: "We are not blocking traffic, we *are* traffic!".

Critical Mass is not a formal bicycle advocacy organization; it has been referred to as a protest, a form of street theatre, a method of commuting, a party, and a social space (Blickstein and Hanson 2001). It is conceived as both protest and celebration ("bicycling's defiant celebration"; Carlsson 2002) and as an "organized coincidence" but not a demonstration (ibid.). It adheres to several anarchist principles, as there are no leaders, no (formal) organizers, no charter, and the route unfolds organically (Furness 2007).

Critical Mass makes the presence of cyclists on city streets visible both in a hostile environment and in the media and political sphere (Furness 2010). Technically, streets are part of the public domain, but they are ideologically constructed to encourage certain forms of mobilities while inhibiting others (Furness 2007). Critical Mass reclaims the place of cyclists, who are a marginalized minority in car-dominated contexts (Prati, Marín Puchades, and Pietrantoni 2017; Koglin and Rye 2014). They demand their right to the city, defined by Lefebvre (1974) as "the right to participate in urbanity, the right to appropriate the city not merely as an economic unit, but as a home and as an expression of lived experience". The demand for cyclists to have a right to the city requires that their experiences and needs (e.g. in terms of safety) be taken into account when developing infrastructure, including in cities that are considered to be cycling-friendly such as Bogotá (Castañeda 2020).

Critical Mass events are both highly localized and mobile. They represent prefigurative politics, demonstrating temporarily how urban space *could* be (Horton 2006a), and are part protest against car culture and capitalism, part resistance to the everyday intimidation of cyclists and the systemic discrimination against cycling (Carlsson 2002). The location in which Critical Mass takes place – the street – is a place where cyclists can literally demonstrate a viable, albeit partial, alternative to the domination of automobility (Furness 2007, 307). Critical Mass has been regarded as part of the DIY urbanism movement, understood to mean unauthorized, grassroots, citizen-led, small-scale, functional, temporary, creative and place-specific urban interventions (Iveson 2013; LaFrombois 2018). It is a way of experiencing and reclaiming urban space, although it is not without its tensions and problems, and these night-time bike rides can be fraught with social hierarchies and racist and sexist attitudes (LaFrombois 2018).

While the RCP shares certain core characteristics with Critical Mass, it is a vehicle for a wide range of demands.[2] We will use the concept of mobility justice to analyse why and how cycling is a contentious spatial and social practice in the case of Santiago de Chile.

3. Research approach

3.1. Territorial context

Santiago, the Chilean capital, has 8 million inhabitants and is spread out over a large area (839 km^2). Public infrastructure, services, jobs and transport are concentrated in the northeast (the most affluent area) and the centre of the city (Rodriguez Vignoli 2008). This unequal distribution and the high transport costs from one area to another lead to inequalities in daily mobility.[3]

Over the last ten years, the modal share of cycling has continued to grow (1% of journeys in 2000, 4–5% in 2014) (Fajardo 2013). It is decreasingly perceived as the mode of transport of the poor, and the bike is becoming a fashionable object (ibid.). The San Cristóbal hill overlooking the city is invaded by cyclists on summer evenings; however, cycling facilities have not kept up with this trend. Nevertheless, following the model of Bogotá's *CicloRecreoVía*, some streets, mainly in the wealthier neighbourhoods, are closed to car traffic on Sundays.

Chile is one of the most prosperous countries in South America. However, the "Chilean miracle" masks a highly unequal distribution of wealth (2nd among OECD countries) and a low quality of life (also ranked 2nd among OECD countries), as well as extensive privatization of services, making them difficult to access (water, transport, education, pensions).

On 18 October 2019, the announcement of an increase in the metro fare caused a major social crisis. High school and university students mobilized under the slogan *Evadir, no pagar, otra forma de luchar* (Flee, don't pay, another way to fight), jumping turnstiles and destroying metro stations. While isolated mobilizations have punctuated Chile's recent history, the crisis goes beyond the issue of metro fares, and a major social movement has emerged in reaction to social inequalities. The *Plaza de Italia*, dubbed *Plaza de la Dignidad* (Dignity Square) by the protesters, became the symbolic epicentre of the revolt due to its location at the intersection of rich and poor neighbourhoods, and was the backdrop to violent confrontations with the military. At the height of the demonstrations, tens of thousands of people took to the streets. In response, the Chilean government agreed to hold a referendum to change the current constitution, which was inherited from the dictatorship of General Pinochet (1973–1990). Following a positive result in the referendum (78%) in October 2020, a constituent assembly composed of citizens has been charged with drafting a new constitution.

Cycling collectives quickly joined the protest and launched the "Cycling Revolution" on 27 October 2019 (Figure 1). The enthusiasm of this 35,000-participant strong first edition encouraged the creation of other collectives in the 34 municipalities of Santiago (except for the three most affluent ones). Each neighbourhood had its own meeting place before reaching Dignity Square. Cycling rallies (*cicletadas*) organized by the different collectives also took place almost daily before the pandemic and the RCP spread to other Chilean cities.

3.2. Methodology

Our analysis analyses the demands of the RCP and spans from the beginning of the social crisis in October 2019 until the vote for a new constitution a year later. At the beginning of this period, the first author of this paper observed the RCP through video recordings and photos, in order to identify the messages, slogans and demands. He also participated in the *cabildos*[4] of cycling collectives, in order to hear from activists about the organization of demonstrations and about political, environmental and urban planning issues. During the Covid-19 pandemic, analysis of the RCP continued at a distance via social networks, where its members are very active.

The observations were supported by interviews with the RCP spokesperson on social networks (referred to as Pablo in this paper for the sake of anonymity), the director of an

Figure 1. Dignity Square during the first RCP on 27 October 2019 (source: Cristian Alejandro Carrillo Ávila).

association working to promote cycling (Gloria), an activist member of several cycling NGOs (Andrea) and a feminist cycling activist (Carolina). These people, representing a wide range of actors within the cycling movement, were encountered in a variety of different locations: at a *cabildo* (Pablo), through a network of bicycle travellers (Gloria and Carolina) and at a weekly meeting of the NGO Ciudad Viva. The interviews varied in length from 32 to 67 minutes and started with general questions about the interviewee's cycling practice, their opinion on the city's cycling infrastructure, before continuing with an in-depth discussion about their activism (both with regard to cycling and other areas) and the RCP. The various quotes cited in this paper are translated from Spanish by the authors.

A flyer is created for each RCP event to signal the main messages of the campaign, the themes of which change according to current events. We conducted an inventory of the abundant visual material produced (flyers, slogans, photos, signs, banners, etc.),[5] and our analysis of the recurrence and meanings of slogans led us to classify them into four families of demands: cycling, political, environmental and feminist. While the RCP, like Critical Mass, is eminently political (e.g. about the way cities and societies should be organized), we use the term "political" here to refer to the political system (elections, politicians in charge, etc.) and social inequalities.

Significant elements (composition, colours, messages, symbols, etc.) were used to interpret the demands based on a visual methodology (Rose 2016), and in particular the dimensions highlighted by the concept of mobility justice (type of mobility, scale, inequalities, specificity of the cycling movement). This paper presents a selection of emblematic examples.

4. The demands of the Plurinational Cycling Revolution

4.1. Cycling demands

As with Critical Mass, the first set of demands concerns the place of cyclists and their right to the city. The RCP emerged in a context where cycling was expanding. This expansion was strengthened by the social crisis and the closure of metro stations vandalized during the riots but took place in a city dominated by motorized vehicles with little in the way of cycling infrastructure. The cyclists' demands are expressed on the level of the individual (safety, integrity and also physical distancing due to the pandemic) as well as on the level of the city of Santiago (accessibility), and relate to the need for adequate infrastructure for utility cycling (beyond recreational cycle paths) and to the political and social legitimacy of cycling as a mode of transport in its own right.

The Cycling Revolution extends the demands of the *Movimiento Furiosos Ciclistas* (Furious Cyclists' Movement), which, as mentioned above, launched the *Cicletada del Primer Martes*[6] (which takes place on the first Tuesday of each month) in Santiago in 1995, modelled on Critical Mass. Over the years, the event has become an institution, according to one activist (Andrea), having lost the protest element and become a simple festive cycling event. Since these first movements, cyclists have developed a greater presence in Santiago, and "cycling is now seen as something positive" (ibid.). Yet this development has not been accompanied by new infrastructure, and the president's campaign promise to build 800 km of cycle paths has remained unfulfilled. Nevertheless, cycling is characterized by significant potential. According to Andrea, "Chile is the country in Latin America with the most cycling collectives. This shows the desire of the population to cycle but also to promote its use. The government is not doing this despite environmental and public health problems such as child obesity".

Cycling is also claimed as an alternative to be developed in a congested city dominated by the car. The RCP represents only a momentary change in the domination of the streets. This claim is however a source of tension in terms of legitimacy and appropriation of space. A deputy from the presidential right-wing party denounced in Congress "the cyclists' movements [which] have taken control and privatized the streets in an authoritarian manner, limiting the freedom and tranquillity of motorists to move normally". The participants replied that, on the contrary, they are exercising their right to the city in Santiago, where cycling is dangerous owing to the lack of infrastructure and inconsiderate behaviour by motorists.

Riding en masse across Santiago is both a symbolic and a practical way to reclaim space from the dominant motorized traffic. It is also a way to get to know the city better, as stated by Gloria: "Cycling fosters social interaction between participants. It allows people to explore parts of the city that are not part of their 'mental maps' and daily routes". This is made possible by riding en masse, allowing participants to feel that the city is within their reach.

Cycling took a back seat at the start of the pandemic and the campaign continued online. Yet as lockdowns ended, cycling became more popular (as opposed to public transport modes) because it enabled people to respect physical distancing rules. Temporary cycle paths appeared (particularly in affluent neighbourhoods), and some of the middle classes also turned to cycling, as it is more economical than driving. The health

crisis has accentuated social inequalities. Casual workers (about one third of the active population) living on the outskirts, however, have not benefitted from the new cycle paths and are faced with a lack of secure bicycle parking around public transport stops (Jirón 2020).

Cycling collectives reacted to the pandemic in several ways. They offered mechanics courses for new cyclists. The RCP promoted cycling as a healthy means of transport, which strengthens the immune system and ensures physical distancing with slogans such as "More cycle paths, less infection". RCP participants also contributed essential goods and organized ollas comunes (soup kitchens) during lockdown.

In the context of the social crisis, cycling demands are not the most prominent within the RCP. However, they came to the fore in September 2020 and the cyclists took to the streets once again ("Let's contain the use of private cars and reclaim the city!" and "The next pandemic is cycling"). Many fatal accidents involving cyclists are caused by speeding cars and buses in a confined and relatively uncongested city. Processions were organized in memory of the victims to demand greater safety on the capital's roads. The slogan "No more dead cyclists" (*No+ Ciclistas Muertxs*) (Figure 2) was spread throughout the city and chanted in front of the transport minister's house to protest her inaction. Awareness-raising activities were also organized along roads to encourage motorists to maintain a distance of 1.5 m when overtaking.

In the context of the expansion of cycling in Santiago and a social crisis that brought into question some of the foundations of Chilean society, the bicycle has become a symbol of transformation. The RCP's demands thus go far beyond cycling activism, as shown by the flyer's two other slogans (Figure 2): "I approve" (*Apruebo*; in reference to the referendum on the constitution) and "Dignity, the planet, your future".

Figure 2. RCP flyer, 11 October 2020.

4.2. Political demands

The RCP is a participant in the general social protest movement: "We are cyclists and we join the fight". Daily mobility and being able to travel by bike are seen as part of the "dignity" of the Chilean people. Riding en masse is a way to protest against local and national social inequalities (such as the cost of transport). Mass cycling movements are also used to critique the political system.

The slogan of the high school students calling for changes to metro fees – "Flee, don't pay, another way to fight" – has been adapted by the cyclists into "Flee, pedal, another way to fight". Certain symbols have also been adopted. For example, flyers ask cyclists to bring a pan or a stove. The pan concerts (Cacerolazos) have reappeared with the social crisis. These protests involving the banging of pots, pans and lids, accompanied by shouted or sung refrains, were a way of demonstrating and getting around the curfew during the dictatorship. More generally, the RCP's communications affirm its desire to make cycling a vehicle for change: "For our children, for our brothers, for our cousins, for our nephews, for our neighbours, for our students, for them we cannot give up, for them we cannot let go of the street" (RCP Facebook, 11 November 2019).[7]

According to one activist (Andrea), at the beginning of the crisis, "we were already talking about revolution, so we just had to call it cycling". For her, RCP makes "an important contribution" because "the emblematic form of non-electoral political behaviour is occupation of the streets". Cycling events allow greater visibility by covering a wider area, and the routes connect symbolic places of power (the presidential palace) and protest (Dignity Square). Being and riding together inspires emulation, and the demonstrators have direct contact with the populations of the different neighbourhoods, including those in the outskirts that are most affected by inequalities. According to Pablo, people "have realised that the protest that was centred in one place can now move around the city. All their social demands are moving through this movement in a critical mass. [. . .] People's acceptance has changed, they respect cyclists more, they give you water [. . .]" (Figure 4). The RCP also helps raise the visibility of cycling by attracting people who are not members of cycling collectives but "join the movement just to be part of the general revolt".

Photographs in order: "The fight continues for anew Chile"; "I approve the new constitution"; "No more dead cyclists" and the flag of the women's movement; people spraying water on participants to refresh them; the green scarf of the abortion rights movement.

The RCP flyers (Figure 3) demand the "dignity" of the Chilean people, which has been affected by many social inequalities. The framing of this image evokes a movement that brings together a large number of cyclists with a diversity of profiles. A little girl is in the centre. She symbolizes that the movement is aimed at the whole population and emphasizes its good-natured and non-violent nature. Advice is given as if for a bicycle tour (bring water, food, helmet, repair kit, etc.). The protective glasses and bandana are a reminder of the protest aspect and possible confrontations with the police.

The RCP's political demands are the most evident. They form part of the general context of rejection of the political system, as expressed by the cyclist wearing a sign on their back stating "For a new Chile" (Figure 4). This desire to break with the system can

Figure 3. RCP flyer for 29 December 2019.

be heard in the rallying cries chanted at each demonstration, such as "Piñera[8] is a murderer like Pinochet" or "The people are on the streets and demand dignity". Other signs show support for pensioners in precarious financial situations: "No more AFP" (privatized pension fund administration).

In Figure 6, the flag of the Mapuches is also visible. Representing 13% of the population, Chile's indigenous people are often the victims of expropriation of their ancestral lands by copper mining companies, and their existence is not recognized in the constitution. Thus the adjective "plurinational" was added to the name of the movement and, as of the 4th event on 17 November 2019, the *Revolución Ciclista Nacional* (National Cycling Revolution) became the *Revolución Ciclista Plurinacional* (Plurinational Cycling Revolution), to recognize the multiculturality of Chile. Almost a year later, in the week before the vote on the new constitution on 25 October, the message *Apruebo* (I approve) predominated at the processions. It was repeated on the flyer of the RCP event three days before the referendum with the slogan "Join the bike ride for people who approve" (Figure 2).

4.3. Environmental demands

The cyclists' signs feature environmental demands. The slogan "Dignity, the planet, your future", which has been on all flyers since the beginning, shows that the RCP also places environmental issues at the heart of its concerns, which are closely linked to mobility:

Figure 4. Scenes from various RCP events (Source: Alfonso Atavales Gallardo).

Figure 5. RCP Flyer for World Recycling Day on 18 March 2020.[10]

Figure 6. Flyer for the Feminist Bike Ride on 17 October 2020.

"70% of environmental pollution comes from transport and industry [. . .] The social crisis is also environmental". (RCP Facebook, 27 December 2019). The environmental claims are focused both on the global level (climate change, finite resources, recycling, etc.) and the city level, considering that Santiago is among the most polluted cities in the world, with significant sections of the population suffering from pollution-related health issues. The cycling movement thus supports the right to live in a healthy environment and advocates for environmental justice.

Cycling is associated with sustainability because of its very low environmental impact. It also makes some cyclists particularly aware of the environmental issues. When they cycle, they can see the toxic cloud that covers the city in winter, and cycle tourists bear witness to the environmental degradation of the country (deforestation, drought etc.). The movement also supports people claiming the right to live in a healthy environment. For example, a banner bearing the legend "The right to breathe in peace" flew above the RCP in January 2020.

According to Andrea, "cycling in Santiago has progressed from being a simple form of transport to one that expresses an ecological consciousness [. . .] and the climate crisis represents a unique opportunity to achieve this transformation". When Santiago was forced to give up hosting the Climate Change Conference (COP25) due to the social crisis, the RCP, in collaboration with the Fridays for Future movement, arranged for *El Viejito Pascuero* (the Chilean Santa Claus) to deposit coal and sand in front of the Ministry of the Environment to protest its inaction.

Cycling collectives are also active in raising awareness of environmental protection by participating in initiatives with specific ecological objectives. Some gatherings specifically pursued such goals, such as *Bici-forestación* (reforestation by bike)[9] or the promotion of the Mapocho Ciclo Parque (a bike path through Santiago along the Mapocho River). For

the RCP organized on World Recycling Day (18 March 2020) a flyer shows two people with a cargo-bike collecting old bicycles to repair them (as shown by the recycle symbol surrounding the bicycle icon) (Figure 5). This image reminds us that the bicycle can easily be repaired (e.g. in community-run workshops or in the mechanical courses that the RCP gave after the lockdown) and can be regarded as a "convivial tool". For Illich (1973), a convivial tool enables citizens to "reconquer practical knowledge for autonomy and creativity rather than being confined to commercial relations".

4.4. Feminist demands

The women's rights movement has joined the national protest, and feminist cyclists have taken advantage of the visibility of the RCP to assert their demands within a society marked by patriarchal culture. The Women's Plurinational Cycling Revolution was formed shortly after the RCP, and participated in the rallies. "Women are transforming social movements, cycling revolutions are part of the global history of women's emancipation and empowerment!" states the RCP Facebook page (2 March 2020). Feminist demands focus on the place of different minorities in the city and in society and reject traditional logics of domination and subordination; these demands operate on the level of the individual, the street and the city (integrity of the body and accessibility of urban amenities).

As well as taking part in general RCP rallies, specific events are also organized, such as the "Girls" Bike Ride', the "Feminist and Anti-Patriarchal Bike Ride" and a bike ride to approve the new constitution (*Cicletada Feminista por el Apruebo*, Figure 6). The flyer of this event shows the symbolic green scarf (also used as a mask, due to the pandemic), a purple streak, the colour of the feminist movement, the LGBT+ rainbow flag, the raised fist as a sign of protest, the Mapuche flag and another flag calling for a yes vote on constitutional change

The green scarf on Figure 6 is worn by many participants. This symbol of Latin American feminist movements was created in 2003 by Argentinean feminists in their fight for the right to abortion, a right that is still not universal in Chile. It tends to be worn whenever feminist demands are at the forefront of the RCP (e.g. International Women's Day, 8 March; and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November). According to Carolina, member of the feminist cycling group FEM, "the green scarf allows you to be an activist 24 hours a day, when you travel to work by bike, etc". What's more, riding a bike makes the scarf visible to more people and in more spaces.

Feminist demands are closely linked to cycling, as highlighted by Carolina: "We are cyclists first and feminists second, but we have realized that cycling is not being addressed from a feminist point of view and we want to make it visible at the RCPs". Cycling in Santiago poses difficult conditions, a problem that is more acute for women in certain neighbourhoods or at night. There is also the fact that some participants have felt unsafe around men at the RCPs. This harks back to certain behaviours at some of the early Critical Mass events in the 1990s by some groups, termed by Ferrell (2001, 114–21) the "testosterone brigade". Rallies, where women cycle in large numbers demand the right to ride safely and to participate fully in social and economic life.

In general, however, the four ranges of demands – cyclist, political, environmental and feminist – seem to coexist well according to our interviewees, and highlight the role of the

bicycle as a tool for change. For Pedro, there is no tension between the different groups within the RCP, the prevailing goal of the union being to change Chilean society. Andrea believes that the strength of the RCP is this union of people from all walks of life: "Each cyclist who joins the RCP may do so for a different reason depending on his or her personal situation. However, they want to participate in the general social revolt". Some older cycling collectives, such as the one of which Gloria is a member, believe that "dialogue with institutions is needed to improve infrastructure and have an impact in the long term". According to her, the RCP is "too spontaneous, organized on social networks by young people" and lacks experience in communicating with politicians and the media.

4.5. Discussion and conclusion

The Santiago de Chile Plurinational Cycling Revolution (RCP), through its frequency of activity (several times a week at least outside of the lockdown period), duration (several months in a row) and scale (thousands of participants at each event) has become part of the landscape of the Chilean capital. While cycling is not always political in every case and location, its significance depends on the social, cultural and political context (Cox 2015). In the context of Santiago's political and social crisis, riding en masse gives cycling a specific meaning as the RCP has cyclist, political, environmental and feminist demands.

This social movement follows the principles of Critical Mass by bringing together cyclists in large numbers to ride across the city, without any formal organization (Furness 2007, 2010). The RCP acts as a voice for cyclists, demanding greater safety and a reimagining of the place of motorized traffic in a congested city. The RCP challenges the cultural and spatial dominance of the automobile and motorized traffic and enables space to be taken back from automobility both symbolically and literally. Riding en masse creates a space of resistance that defies the norms of motorized space while also allowing participants to get to or to discover other parts of the city. Finally, it creates a new social space where the identity of being a cyclist is reinforced through common experiences.

Contrary to Castells' proposition, streets and squares are not simply the backdrop to the struggle, but the very objective of the movement. For the RCP, the streets and the city have a double role; they serve as the stage for a fight in which cyclists, through their ability to be mobile, spread the protest messages by circulating throughout the neighbourhoods, while also representing in themselves the demand for a right to the city and, more specifically, the right to cycle safely in order to get to and benefit from its amenities (Lefebvre 1974). Although streets are part of the public domain, Furness, in his analysis of Critical Mass, shows that they are ideologically constructed to encourage certain forms of mobilities while inhibiting others (Furness 2007). The RCP makes the same argument with regard to cyclists (in respect to motorized traffic) but also to other minority groups (women, indigenous people, etc.) and to inhabitants who suffer from the negative externalities of other mobilities (air pollution, etc.).

Thus the RCP is not only active in the field of urban cycling, but is involved in the protest movements that have been sweeping Chile since October 2019 and in the desire for change expressed in the demand for a new constitution. A vehicle for political, environmental and feminist demands, the RCP pursues two of the objectives of social movements identified by Castells (1983): both collective consumption (the place and

legitimacy of cyclists) and the defence of citizens' rights regardless of their gender, social class, national origin or sexual orientation.

Using the prism of mobility justice (Sheller 2018), the analysis shows that the RCP's demands refer to different mobility crises. They highlight inequalities in access to safe and easy travel according to social class, gender, sexual orientation and national origin, as well as mode of transport. They denounce the structures that perpetuate them: the political system, neoliberalism, the patriarchy and the automobile system. They also illustrate the different levels of the mobility crises, from the individual (movement achieved through the cyclists' own physical strength; need for safety and physical integrity) to the planet (environmental impact), via the city (access to urban amenities) and the country (the political system) (Table 1).

The bicycle enables each of the four types of demands to challenge the existing dominant codes and uses of space (Horton 2006a, 2006b). It is part of a broader context, acting as a symbol of sustainable, safe and socially just mobility and also providing a way to implement this (and therefore to participate in urban life). Overall, the bicycle appears to be a resilient mode of transport (Héran, 2020) in light of the political, economic, social and also health crises experienced by Chile and its capital. In the context of the Chilean political and social crisis, cycling appears to represent a symbol of both change and embodied politics (Furness 2007). By bringing into focus multiple demands, it is used as a vector of the fight for systemic change. Further work would however be needed first on the RCP (perception by other social movements, evolution of the RCP, effects on the political debates and decisions, etc.). More research could also address cycling movements in a global and comparative perspective to analyse the nature of their demands, the influence of the spatial and temporal context, the circulation of ideas between countries and the varying meanings they give to the bicycle.

Table 1. Summary of RCP demands and their characteristics.

Demands	Cyclist	Political	Environmental	Feminist
Mobility dimension	Daily mobility Health crisis	Daily mobility "Dignity" of the Chilean people	Environmental impact of transport	Inclusion of social groups in the city and in society (women, LGBT+, etc.)
Scale	From the level of the individual (physical integrity, health, physical distance) to that of the city (accessibility)	City and Chile more generally	From the city (health, reforestation, etc.) to the planet (climate change, resources etc.)	From the individual level (physical integrity) to that of the street and the city (accessibility)
Inequalities	Domination of the car system	Social inequalities (cost of living, transport supply)	Pollution, environmental justice	Gender inequalities, patriarchy etc.
Specificity of the cycling movement	Cyclists' needs (infrastructure, political and social legitimacy)	Participates in general social and political protest	Environmentally friendly mode of transport	Cycling as a tool for emancipation and empowerment

Notes

1. The bicycle once again is a linchpin of progressive politics, but "somewhat ironically, for precisely contrary reasons to its original appeal to earlier feminists and socialists, who had, through their use of the bicycle, critiqued excessive social, political, economic and geographical immobility;" (Horton 2006a, 11).
2. Several other cycling movements across the globe have demands that go beyond cycling. This is the case of Monde à Bicyclette in Montreal (nuclear energy, feminism, the developing world, gay rights, etc.), the Yellow Bike Project (YBP) in the United States (which promotes cycling as an instrument of social change to ensure the mobility of marginalized people), and more recently, the Street Riders NYC collective (formed in June 2020 following the assassination of George Floyd, promoting cycling as a means of fighting for greater social justice) (R 2020).
3. Families in the outskirts of the city spend almost 30% of their salary on transport, while the richest spend just 2%.
4. A meeting of ideas (formerly on economic, political issues, etc.) revived during the social crisis.
5. This abundant online material echoes the participatory framework of "Xerocracy", or "rule through photocopying", that characterized the first Critical Mass. "Xerocrats" print flyers, stickers, posters, missives and zines to raise awareness about the campaign, give timings for collective bike rides, attract participants, etc. (F 2007).
6. This movement was born out of a conflict with the mayor of the municipality of Las Condes, who did not keep his promise to build bicycle parking at the Escuela Militar station.
7. This is not the first example in Chilean history. A member of the Salvador Allende's government claimed that "El socialismo puede llegar solo en bicicleta" (Illich 1974: 11): "Socialism can only arrive by bicycle".
8. Piñera has been President of Chile since 2018.
9. As part of Bici-forestación, 4000 cyclists replanted 2000 trees in a part of the region that had been devastated by fires and deforestation. This event took place before the start of the RCP, but several of the same actors were involved.
10. The day was established to commemorate the murder of 10 waste pickers in Colombia in 1992.

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