

Are moto-taxis a peripheral mode in African urban mobility systems?

Among recent developments in African cities, the spread of motorcycle taxis is undoubtedly one of the most significant processes, although it has been observed very unevenly, several decades/years after South-East Asia, where it is now an essential mode of transport (Guézéré, 2021). However, due to its recent emergence and uneven implementation, studies on the medium/long-term impacts and consequences of motorcycle taxis on urban and interurban mobility remain relatively sparse and often focus on their negative externalities (Courtright & Behrens, 2024). Beyond the scientific community, public authorities and international institutions are struggling to implement ambitious and integrated public policies, with measures often oscillating between prohibition and laissez-faire. This still limited engagement of the scientific community and public authorities on the issue of motorcycle taxis reflects a global difficulty in understanding the flows and practices associated with this mode of transport, and sometimes even questions whether it belongs to the categories of public or collective transport (Olvera, Plat & Pochet, 2020). Indeed, although the vehicle is shared, its very low capacity limits the number of passengers that can be transported, while the fragmentation of the fleet and the evolution of professional and organisational structures are clearly different from what is generally observed in the paratransit sector, for example.

In addition to the need to document and analyse the spread of motorcycle taxis in African cities and their impact on urban systems, this session also aims to raise the limitations posed by the consideration of motorcycle taxis at several levels. On the one hand, the role of motorcycle taxis in mobility systems remains unaddressed by public policy in most of the cities where they operate. On the other hand, the position of international institutions is also ambiguous, as they sometimes support the electrification of the sector (Amedokpo & Boutueil, 2023) and sometimes refuse to consider this mode of transport as genuine public transport. Finally, the scientific community also seems undecided, particularly on the possibility of including this mode in the more general category of "paratransit" and considering it as a sustainable and long-term mode of transport in African cities.

One of the objectives of this session will therefore be to understand why this mode of transport remains largely marginal in African cities, and what these difficulties reveal about the ways of thinking and visions of the African city held by these different categories of actors.