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Raúl Acosta-García (München)

Aspirations in Movement: A Phenomenological Ethnography of Cyclo-Activism in Mexico

Over the last ten years, more people have taken up cycling in Mexico City and Guadalajara as a form of transportation than in previous decades. The stark increase in bicycle use in both cities has taken place on the back of a wave of activism through which numerous citizen groups have demanded improved infrastructures for cycling. These efforts have in turn counted with the support of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), development agencies and foundations, as well as other groups promoting sustainable transport within a broader agenda for environmental issues. Local governments have incorporated some demands as policies, and have built hundreds of kilometres of cycleways and other types of infrastructures. For cyclo-activists, however, what is most important is to promote the experiential discovery of the self and of the city that they claim cycling entails. This paper elaborates on what an approach from a phenomenological ethnography perspective entails for the study of how activists experience urban cycling, the interventions with which they aim to raise awareness among motorists, and in the manner in which they promote cycling itself. This approach is informed by Jackson's 'existential anthropology' (2013) with particular attention to Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project on phenomenological reasoning (Hass 2008). With these conceptual tools, I interpret activists' evolving aspirations through increasingly sophisticated expertise as an exercise of 'knowledge by acquaintance.'

Raúl Acosta-García is a social anthropologist focused on activism and the political. He is currently in the final stages as Principal Investigator of the DFG funded project "Aspirational activism in urban Latin America." Since January 2019, he has joined the second phase of the multidisciplinary research group project on "Urban Ethics" at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, where he will examine the ways in which various governmental and non-governmental actors apply the imperative of environmental care through globalized environmental discourses and practices in Mexico City. He received his doctoral (DPhil) and masters' (MPhil) degrees from the University of Oxford. After a lectureship in ITESO, Mexico, he has held postdoc positions at the universities of Deusto, in Bilbao, Spain, and Konstanz. He has carried out fieldwork in Spain, Brazil, and Mexico.

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Weitere Informationen: www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de