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The Bicycle: Rethinking How We Move Around Our Cities
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EDITORIAL

The Bicycle: Rethinking How We Move Around Our Cities

Mohammad Nazarpoor

Cycling is not only a physical movement from A to B, but also a critical bodily practice, a way of life, and a meaningful method of self-presentation. In the Iranian context, a bicycle is a seemingly simple tool, but a complex and intertwined phenomenon with cultural, social, political, and environmental aspects. For someone who rides a bike in Tehran, the bicycle is a means to transform the urban experience and a way to express citizenship. If you are a woman, it is even more than that; the bicycle is an emancipatory tool to transform lived space and cycling is a practice to represent power and challenge hegemonic socio-political structures from below.

Bicycle is a human-powered vehicle that can play an effective role in addressing complex urban challenges and transforming various aspects of our urban life. It can become an important mode for short trips, while connecting with public transportation for long trips. It alleviates many environmental problems, promotes individual and social community health, improves human relationships and social ties, builds socio-cultural identities with others and places, and plays a leading role in creating human-centered cities. Understanding such a complex nature and the multiple roles of bicycles and cycling practice requires adopting an interdisciplinary perspective and drawing on multiple narratives and lived experiences in this context.

In this issue, our aim was to explore "the bicycle" by developing an interdisciplinary perspective and understanding lived experiences to provide a rich, in-depth, and holistic view of cycling practice. Our goal was to explain the intersection of the bicycle with various environmental, social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions that make it a complex object to be discussed from different angles. We are very excited to receive a variety of valuable contributions from a wide range of geographical contexts (USA, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, India, Australia, England, etc.) which has made multiple perspectives for looking at bicycles. We hope this issue can develop interdisciplinary, human-centered narratives about mobility in our society and beyond. ■

In the 16th KOOCHE

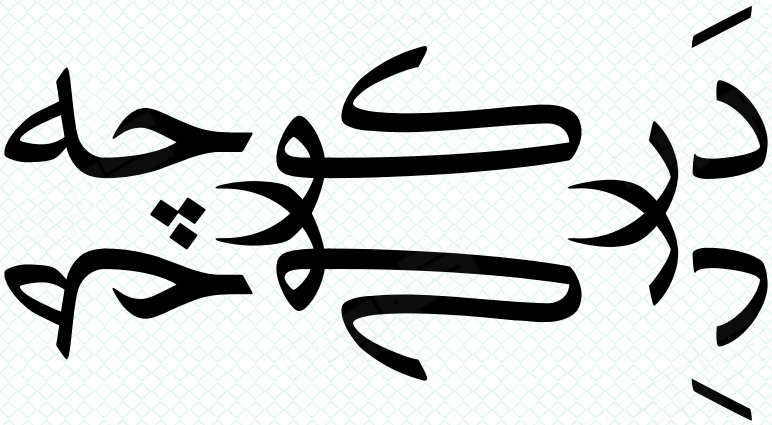
▸ The bicycle, a device that reminds you of the "way" among many destinations today; The joy of experiencing a sense of liberation and independence, along with a little spice of fear of losing your balance. A bike that accompanies you instead of controlling you. A tool that has the power to transform today's car-oriented cities into more human-centered ones. The prerequisite for keeping your balance is the will to pedal and keep going.

• In this issue of KOOCHE Magazine, in the **Dossier** section, an attempt has been made to explore "the bicycle" by developing an interdisciplinary perspective and understanding lived experiences to provide a rich, in-depth, and holistic view of cycling practice. The goal is to explain the intersection of the bicycle with various environmental, social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions that make it a complex object to be discussed from different angles.

• **The main questions of the issue**

1. What does a bicycle mean to you?
2. What place does the bicycle occupy in your daily life and what meaning does it have for you?
3. How can the bicycle be represented at the intersection of politics, gender, class, culture, etc.?
4. How can we redefine the role of the bicycle and its potential in addressing today's urban challenges?
5. How is the bicycle changing our lived experience of the city?
6. How have bicycles and cycling become prevalent in our society today?
7. What are the characteristics of a bicycle-friendly city?
8. What are the main socio-political dimensions of cycling planning in your context?
9. What is the role of hard infrastructure in the development of urban cycling?
10. What role do activists and NGOs play in promoting urban cycling?
11. How can we strengthen the human infrastructure of cycling?
12. How can we shift the planning paradigms in car-centric environments?
13. How can we transfer knowledge and lessons learned from best practices?

• In the **Chapkhaneh** section, we have provided a book review of Cycling Activism: Bike Politics and Social Movements written by Peter Cox. ■

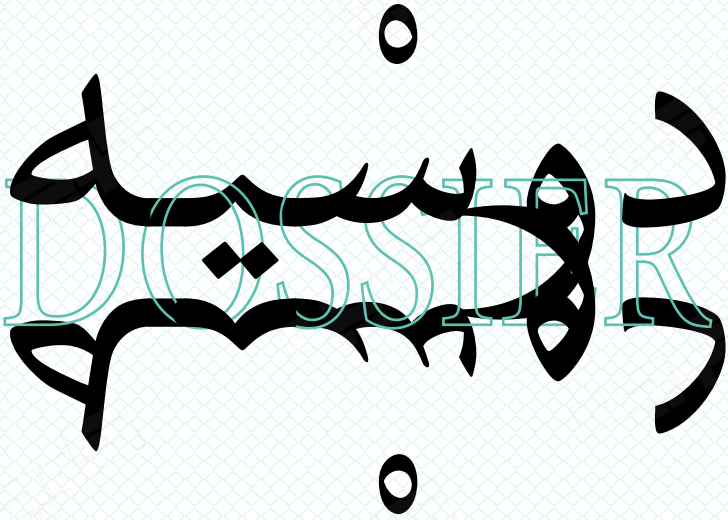


In KOOCHE MAGAZINE, will–ye nill–ye,
we communicate with all kinds of people;
We will walk together on the allay.
We will get acquainted with the wounds
and scars on the physical identity of
“KOOCHE” and find out what kind of rubs
and poultices can be applied to them.
Walk with us in the KOOCHE!

EDITORIAL

DOSSIER

CHAPKHANEH



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Dossier /ˈdɒsɪə, ˈdɒsɪeɪ/ . document. file

Learning from Historic Cycling Activism

Cyclists have organised and acted together to protect themselves and each other; and to point towards more positive futures since the nineteenth century. This essay highlights this tradition of activism to emphasise its continuing importance.

Peter Cox ←
Professor of Sociology, University of Chester, UK

Cyclists and social activism have been connected for over one hundred and fifty years. Riders have organised not just for protection or own self-interest but also to express broader visions of social transformation. Today, cycling activism also puts into practice visions of future societies in which cycling is an integral part of low carbon travel. This essay examines historical examples of cycling activism to see what can be learned from previous campaigning.

As soon as cyclists organised themselves into clubs for riding-even before the safety bicycle- they began to campaign for better conditions in which to ride. Two early groups from the UK illustrate this. The National Cyclists' Union (NCU) was formed "To secure a fair and equitable administration of justice as regards the rights of bicyclists on the public roads" and to organise and regulate cycle racing in Great Britain (Cited in Reid, 2014: 63). Immediately on its founding in 1898 the Bicycle Union (as it was first named), intervened in Parliamentary discussions and established the rights of all cycles to be legally

treated as carriages; that is, as vehicles with the same rights and obligations as other road users (The Bicycle, 1943: 3). The Bicycle Touring Club was founded in August 1878 to assist cycling excursionists and changed its name to the Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC) 5 years later to emphasise the inclusion of (lady) tricyclists alongside its largely male (bicyclist) members (Lightwood, 1928). At the same time, the Bicycle Union merged with the Tricycle Association to become the NCU.

The two groups combined action to institute a system of road signs. For example, to warn riders of road conditions such as steep hills. Cycling in Britain prior to the First World War remained a largely middle-class activity, prices being kept deliberately high by a rigorously enforced manufacturers' cartel (Pinkerton, 1998). Only as usable second-hand machines became available did ridership broaden.

The Road Improvement Association (RIA, founded 1885) was another joint enterprise. It organised conferences and produced pamphlets on road design, publicising macadamised construction and asphalt (surface binding) treatments for more pleasant and safer conditions for all travellers. Similarly, in the USA, the League of American Wheelmen created the Good Roads League in 1892 (Epperson, 2014). A legal test case by the CTC in 1898 sought to prosecute a hostelry for its refusal to offer food to a traveller. A woman cyclist had been turned away for wearing rational dress (divided trousers, not a full skirt). Though they lost the case, they had raised issues for public debate. Was this a case to defend the plaintiff's right as a woman? or as a cyclist? or both? In retrospect we can see how the rational dress issue united the two inseparably.

Self-representation and cyclists' rights were only part of cyclists' collective action. Explicitly socialist cycling clubs were also formed in this era before universal franchise. The Clarion newspaper (founded, 1891) promoted a range of cultural and sporting activities (Prynn, 1976) alongside its arguments for better wages and working conditions. It set up the National

Clarion Cycle Club in 1895 for "the association of various Clarion Cycling Clubs for the purpose of Socialist propaganda and for promoting inter-club runs between the clubs of different towns" (Objects of the NCCC), following the prior foundation of a series of local clubs. Admittedly, some clubs originally founded with a political aim soon gave it up and concentrated on the social aspects, just enjoying riding together.

Other socialist cycling clubs were formed, nationally and locally, elsewhere in Europe. For example, Solidarität, the 'Worker's Cycling Organization' in Germany established in 1896 or the Copenhagen-based [Karl Marx] Arbejdernes Bicycle Club (ABC) of 1894 (Rabenstein, 2001; Hoffman, 2008). For the socialist clubs, cycling was a means to express a vision of wider socialist transformation: to re-appropriate leisure for the majority of the population instead of it being solely a privilege of the bourgeoisie. Practically, cycling together in the Clarion fulfilled a double role, both "[t]o propagate Socialism and Good Fellowship" as stated in the Objects of the NCCC. This was a restatement of the club slogan adapted from the William Morris quotation, "Fellowship is Life, Lack of Fellowship is Death", which served as part of the masthead of The Clarion (Riordan, 2006) in a design by William Crane.

Cycling in ideologically identified clubs allowed participants a space for self-expression, free discussion and acted as a means of propaganda for both cycling and politics. "The Bicycle", wrote a prominent early Clarion member, "brought within easy reach all the things which the new philosophy taught [people] to enjoy". It offered an "escape from city life after the daily round of toil, and gave riders "the power to roam on the King's Highway". … "A luxury hitherto almost the privilege of the within easy reach of all the beauties of the countryside could be enjoyed by mere possession of the magic wheel" [quoted in Pye (1995: 3)]. Rides also provided spaces in which solidarities could be built and ideas discussed. In the latter half of the 1890s, suffrage campaigners Sylvia and Christabel Pankhurst consistently rode with the Manchester Clarion alongside Eva Gore-Booth, another of the city's most prominent suffragists, who linked campaigning for the vote to struggles over women's right to work and to unionisation (Liddington, J. 2014; Tiernan, 2012). Suffrage and socialism were not separate campaigns for these activists.

In Bikes and Bloomers (2018) Kat Jungnickel shows how cycling also provided a means through which women demonstrated innovation and entrepreneurship, through design and patent of radically new clothing patterns. Within the suffrage movement, cycling did not just allow women to travel independently and unchaperoned but also laid the grounds for other forms of collective action and the redefinition of social roles.

Fast forward a century, and the situation had changed dramatically. The dominance of motor traffic had made conditions for cycling intolerable in most European cities. The potential for cycling to provide means for self-expression and independent travel had not changed, but cycling activism had a new challenge to carve out spaces for riding. Roads which were once shared spaces had become dominated by (often high speed) motor traffic. New developments were being implemented solely to advantage car traffic. Cycling all but disappeared from mobility planning, rendering riding amidst motor traffic risky and often unpleasant.

Against this general background a new generation of cyclists organised in their local and natinal situations, using the political tools available to them. In the context of democratic governance, NGO's could offer organised advocacy within the mechanisms of governance in liberal democracies, offering critique and expertise (Feddes, 2019). To get one's voice to be heard in the first place, of course, required public demonstrations and visible forms of activism, tactics that had always been required to get government attention for those without direct access to power in democratic systems.

Since the late 1970s, these campaigning groups have had significant, but varying impacts. My own large-scale assessment suggests that much of the explanation for the relative success or failure of cycling activism is dictated not by the groups themselves, but on the particularities of the political context in which they operate (Cox, 2023). The relative openness or not

of political systems, the delegation of authority for transport planning and its budgeting are not things that cycle campaigners are usually able to control, but strongly determinative for the outcomes of campaigns. Where advocacy has had an unexpected gain is at the supranational level. In the context of climate emergency and international agreements on issues such as air quality and obligations for public health, governments accept the need to recognise imperatives that come down to them from international bodies. Even in the face of (local) government intransigence, organised advocacy has been able to provide expert information to these transnational bodies, resulting in the publication of a new generation of international pro-cycling policies (such as the Pan-European Plan for Cycling Promotion) that have effects both at national and local levels. The task for advocacy today is to ensure that these policies are directed into action and delivered in meaningful ways.

My own hope is that securing better conditions for cycling more generally will allow us to revisit some of the broader visions of equality that are still visible in the writings of those early campaigners and take inspiration from their struggles as part of our shared legacy as cyclists. ■

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Rethinking the Mobility Paradigm

Language is not a neutral mirror of reality that simply describes the world, but has a profound impact on what we see, what we do not see and how we act and shape the world. It is an urgent time to rethink the mobility paradigm to transform our cities.

Marco te Brömmelstroet ←
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University of Amsterdam

▸ When we look to the past, when we try to understand the present, but also when we are thinking about our urban mobility futures, we should therefore turn our attention to the language with which we think, not only as something we use but also as something we can ourselves create, together.

Language is not a Mirror

In our lives we cannot escape using language. We use it to think about the world, to identify problems, to construct solutions, and to develop and share ideas. Language is used to **simplify** complex reality. By definition. The more complex a phenomenon is, the more our language relies on simplifications. To talk about reality, we use concepts, comparisons, metaphors, proxies. By using language, we create a version of reality that also guides our understanding of it.

In this process of simplification, inevitably, we make **choices.** Explicitly or implicitly, but these choices are always arbitrary. Because of these choices we can describe certain dimensions of reality better while ignoring others. As Donella Meadows said: 'The language of an organisation is not an objective means to describe reality- instead it defines what its members see and which actions they undertake'. How does this work? I can ask you to think about this picture and describe it in a short sentence.

Most people would describe this as a deer crossing the road. But another way to describe it is that we are looking at a road crossing the forest. With each of these statements you are using language to simplify reality. And each of these simplifications is as valid as the other. But the choice we make between them guides our attention in thinking about this. It guides what kind of problems we might see. And it guides which solution directions we will consider.

Photographer: David Mark from Pixabay

The same processes underlie our professional languages. Especially when professions get more technical. Their jargon is often more rigid than societal languages. Their chosen simplifications are very often clearly defined, standardised and solidified for the sake of professionalism. You might even say that the more consistent, institutionalised and solidified a professional language is, the more serious a profession is taken by the outside world.

Think, for instance, of the apparent truism that 'time is money', a metaphor coined during the Industrial Revolution. It is only since then that we started to understand clock time as a commodity: something you can sell, for example for labour in a factory. When such new language becomes widely accepted, we start to take the choices it makes, the perspective it gives us, for granted. For example: nowadays the idea that 'time is money' and that time and money are interchangeable goods is not something we question very often.

This is all just a harmless academic debate with little implication, where it not for a third characteristic of language: (1) Language simplifies, (2) makes arbitrary choices, and (3) is also **performative**. Language is not a neutral mirror of reality, but has a profound impact on what we see, what we do not see and **how we act and shape our future together.** Let's take again the statement that Time is Money. As soon as we take that statement for granted, we also start treating our time as a commodity. And we slowly but steadily organize our society and our lives around that notion. We might forget other dimensions of time that cannot easily be expressed in money, such as that time on earth for every human is limited and money becomes worthless after that.

In his book *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott showed how the reality-changing ability of language works with the example of

a forest. Think about a **primaeval forest**. A context-dependent, relatively uncontrolled and complex ecosystem that has evolved over millennia. Many reinforcing and balancing feedback loops ensured that such a forest catered for many different goals. Animals can use it as a hiding place, others can use it as hunting ground, birds and insects can easily nest and a wide variety of animals, plants and trees can grow and thrive. This radically changed at the end of the 18th Century.

Around that time, wood became a vital resource as a fuel and as building material. Land owners became interested in optimising their forests for its wood production. A required new language for this challenge was offered by the new academic domain of scientific forestry. Their core concept of the optimal Standard Tree offered a pragmatic tool to manage large forests. Used as such over a long period of time slowly created a new type of forest: **from primaeval forest to production forest.**

Mixed temperate forest, part managed, part natural regeneration

One aisle of a managed poplar forest in Tuscany

Source: Scott, J. C. (2008)

Mobility Language: The Solidified Dream of Seamless Travel

I would argue that we follow the same logic with our streets. Just as the primaeval forest, the primaeval street was a context-dependent, relatively uncontrolled and complex ecosystem. Rebecca Solnit referred to streets as 'the space left over between buildings' (Solnit, 2000). The outcome of a millennia long process of adding buildings to a city while also keeping them accessible. This street catered for many different goals. It served as public places to meet others, to trade, as places for children to play and spaces through which people travelled. This all radically changed with the large-scale introduction of the car on our streets.

The sheer number of cars was incompatible with how the streets were used. The pressure on society caused by this incompatibility created a window of 'interpretive flexibility' (Norton, 2011: 5); one decade (only 10 years!) in which the dominant narrative could be challenged and new ones were actively sought. To the automotive industry, it was quickly clear that "The future of the automobile in city streets was the

A primaeval street: The pushcart market in the East Side Ghetto of New York's Jewish Quarter in the 1920s. Photographer: Ewing Galloway/ Getty Images

prize in a protracted and sometimes bitter contest. It was a clash not merely of methods, but of first principles." (Ibid: 8). Different views clashed. At first, the mayhem that was caused by the large numbers of motorized vehicles, the large number of children dying, was discussed in terms of justice. Children were by definition innocent. This innovation was unacceptable and needed to adapt to fit the street as it was. Also the police actively defended the status quo of that time: streets belonged to people and cars were seen as a threat to the natural way of the city. But as parents and schools started to educate children to stay out of harms way, the language slowly shifted to principles of order, efficiency and freedom.

After 1930 the fight between the competing discourses settled; motordom succeeded in stabilising the discourse around a certain idea of freedom. The 'freedom' for individuals to drive a car started to dominate the way we think, talk and act on our city streets. It replaced the value of freedom for citizens to make diverse use of their public space. Streets were now discussed in terms of their efficiency as 'efficient' motor thoroughfares.

With this new language, we remade **the primaeval street into a street for moving people and goods as quickly and efficiently as possible from A to B: an idea that fitted neatly into the larger new trend of rational urban planning, which developed its own modernist language in which the city was described as a large, efficient machine. Optimize the machine, marginalize the human!**

In a final phase of solidification, this new mobility language now solidified our imagination. We no longer see its underlying choices. We take it for granted. But it is a mistake with severe consequences to think that our future is a single, "continued movement in the same direction". John Michael Greer said: 'Break out of that mental straightjacket, and the range of

possible futures broadens out immeasurably.' (Greer, 2017: 45).

Most streets are no longer places to play, to meet or to trade. All users now have to comply with the newly created traffic rules. Children are disciplined at an early age to guard their own safety and are taught not to play on their own street, but in dedicated playgrounds. Traders are not allowed to offer their wares in the streets, but only in dedicated, regulated markets. And on all radio stations, everybody is informed every 30 minutes about the fact that the pipelines are not flowing. Throughout the last century these choices in our mobility language solidified into guidelines, into norms and into standards, into laws, regulations and behaviour. They solidified into models, education and institutions. They solidified into asphalt, concrete and steel. The notion of streets as pipelines to be optimised and travelling as a disutility has now even solidified our imagination: we do not question it anymore, we take it for granted.

Mobility solidified as a technical challenge of engineers and experts. It is now seen by most as a puzzle that can be solved, rather than a political dilemma in which hard choices have to be made. And because it is perceived as a technical problem, to be solved by engineers, many people find it hard, if not impossible to see that we in fact face **a political problem that requires hard choices.** And with urgency. **The main point is that our worldviews shape the way we think about mobility, which shapes the way we design our mobility system. In turn this design has important implications for how people engage with that system and with each other in their daily lives.** ■

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Changing Cycling Cultures in Berlin

In Berlin, cycling is drawing attention to itself through rapidly rising user numbers, lifestyle trends and cycling policy demands–urban initiatives, scenes and subcultures are the key drivers of this development. This essay explores cycling cultures in Berlin and the opportunities and challenges of promoting them.

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Introduction

These are golden times for cycling in Berlin: the number of cyclists has been increasing continuously for years, politics and administration seem cooperative, new planning positions are being created and the infrastructure is being gradually expanded. There are also many social initiatives that have developed around cycling and are providing new impetus. The goal of a bicycle-friendly city seems within reach.

But let's start at the beginning. Cycling has experienced a strong increase in importance in recent years, which has become even more important to public awareness due to the corona pandemic. The boom in sales in the bicycle industry and the notorious pop-up cycle lanes that were set up on central Berlin streets at short notice received a great deal of media attention. From an international perspective, Berlin is already seen as a rather bicycle-friendly city. However, while bicycle

traffic has increased continuously and significantly in recent years, the bicycle-related infrastructure and services have not been expanded accordingly- which is reflected, for example, in Berlin's consistently poor results in national comparative studies on bicycle friendliness (ADFC, 2021). The city is now in the middle of a major infrastructural change, due to the extensive work of cycling initiatives, which have mixed-up Berlin's transport policy.

Cycling Scenes and Cycling Policy in Berlin

From my own perspective (shaped by my involvement and research focus), the projects Volksentscheid Fahrrad and Radbahn Berlin are particularly worth mentioning: At the end of 2015, the architectural renderings of the Radbahn Berlin triggered discourse on an emotional and symbolic level and projected a visionary place of longing on a concrete urban landscape. Almost at the same time, the bicycle referendum of the Volksentscheid Fahrrad in 2016 succeeded in a major effort and completely turned around Berlin's bicycle policies. This worked through a changed understanding of planning -in which a comprehensive, safe and comfortable cycling infrastructure was required- as well as through classic measures of social movements and citizen participation, such as local networks, demonstrations, vigils, public campaigns and direct democracy. This laid the foundation for the Berlin Mobility Law which was passed in 2018 and a cycling infrastructure program worth billion Euros (Von Schneidemesser, 2023).

Altogether, dozens of cycling initiatives and hundreds of people were involved, and if there hadn't been a referendum on bicycles and the like, Berlin wouldn't be where it is today in terms of transport policy. In this sense, current developments in cycling policy and planning can be traced back to changes in cycling culture and not the other way around. Bicycle initiatives are to be regarded as one of the central instances that make an important contribution to the traffic turnaround and show ideas and ways of sustainable traffic development. These initiatives are concerned

with riding safely and comfortably through the city, replacing the car and promoting their own ideas of a city worth living in. Aesthetic, sporty and lifestyle aspects of cycling -like "What bike do you ride and how do you look on it?"- tend to be less important for them.

However, exactly these questions of lifestyle and taste are most relevant for the young, sporty and lifestyle-oriented bicycle scenes. In addition to the cycling initiatives, Berlin is one of the European hotspots of urban cycling culture with its hundreds of bike shops, well-known trade fairs and races as well as lively and heterogeneous bike-related scenes and subcultures. The origins of this development can be found primarily in various urban bicycle-related subcultures such as the bicycle-courier scene that emerged in the 1980s, which is strongly characterized by certain symbols of affiliation (including fixed gears, courier bags) and practices (including risky and self-confident riding styles). The styles and practices of bike messengers found their way into urban fashions in the noughties and are still relevant today for much of the development of other bike-related scenes, such as the current fixie, road bike, cyclo-cross, and gravel scenes.

Scenes and subcultures that were once lived only by professional athletes or bicycle couriers are now increasingly part of popular culture and go hand in hand with forms of commercialization, differentiation, aestheticization and lifestyle: young hipsters ride minimalistic, stylish and individual bikes, carry messenger bags and wear expensive bike clothes. In addition, bicycles can be seen in lifestyle blogs, advertising, shop windows or living rooms as decoration and fashionable eye-catchers. Along with this variety of representations of cycling, subtle differences in technology, practices and symbols are important in different urban cycling

The idea of the Radbahn Berlin under the elevated railway viaduct of the U1. Copyright: Radbahn Berlin

Vigil of the bicycle referendum 'Volksentscheid Fahrrad' in Berlin

Photographer: Norbert Michalke, Changing Cities e.V.

scenes and subcultures, as well as in the bicycle economy. In the more general context of racing bikes, for example, there is a relevant difference between being ridden with or without gears, with wide or narrow tires. For outsiders, it all sounds the same, but for cyclists and those who belong to the scene, these specific distinctions go hand in hand with fundamentally different uses, riding styles, scenes, styles and fashions (Hoor, 2020).

These are all developments that have not been furthered by cycling policy, but have emerged in parallel, out of subcultural as well as hedonistic and commercial interests, and are continually presenting the bicycle with new attributes that inspire more and more people to use it, many of them newcomers. Subcultural cycling scenes have thus made a significant contribution to the fact that cycling has become hip and desirable in German cities like Berlin and has thus increased its symbolic value.

Cycling Promotion:
Opportunities and Challenges in Berlin

Despite the cultural developments mentioned, political successes and partial infrastructural measures, cycling in Berlin still requires courage, skill and experience. With a comprehensive and appropriate cycling infrastructure, significantly more and more diverse groups of people could be encouraged to cycle. We are thus faced with a new situation in Berlin: On the one hand, a much more consistent, faster, more comprehensive and long-term transformation into a bicycle-friendly city is required to promote cycling. On the other hand, it is already true today that cycling has lost some of its former harmlessness and, in addition to its enormous social potential, contains certain ambivalences and cultural exclusions. The

bicycle is no longer just the means of transport for ecos, kids and punks, but a signifier of the creative class and urban elite, of progressive and affluent social milieus (Hudde, 2022; Spinney, 2021).

On the positive side, this plays into the hands of the notoriously subordinate cycling promotion and planning. However, important goals such as sustainable and socially just transport development are counteracted if cycling becomes more exclusive and privileged, or if it contributes to gentrification and cultural exclusion. In addition, certain target groups -such as low-income or migrant milieus- are hardly reached by the current promotion of cycling in Berlin. It must therefore be a question of dismantling the various access barriers to use the bicycle, especially for these target groups. These barriers are not only infrastructural, but also cultural, societal or economical: Learning to cycle as a cultural technique, ensuring inexpensive access to functional bicycles, multilingual information campaigns, as well as road safety and mobility education measures would be effective here. In terms of cycling, people like to look enviously at cycling cities like Amsterdam or Copenhagen, but if Berlin continues like this, includes more diverse target groups and gives the bicycle the status it deserves, it can become even better. As one interviewee put it, aptly and flippantly: "If you look [...] what a high proportion of bicycle traffic we have in Berlin. [...] 18 percent despite this crappy infrastructure [...] It's absurd that so many people already cycle. And how huge it could be, or actually should be." ■

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Merleau-Ponty on the Bike!

Our everyday mobility is an embodied, affective and emotional practice that creates diverse perspectives for understanding the city. This essay focuses on mobile sense-making, experiencing, and meaningful engagement with the environment through cycling.

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▸ People not only observe the city whilst moving through it, rather they constitute the city by practicing mobility. The meaning of places in the city is constituted by the movement as much as by their morphological properties (Jensen, 2009). From this perspective, cycling is not only a physical movement from A to B, but also a critical bodily practice, a way of life, and a specific way to experience everyday urban life. A cyclist establishes different ways to actively engage in urban spaces, with the body playing a key part to explore and experience the environment. The main question is how the city is thus reconstructed through the cyclist's bodily experiences.

Lived Body that carries an opposite meaning to the anatomical structure of the body is considered to be the foundation of our being-in-the-world and embodies all aspects of human existence. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the subject is the body, the Object is the worldly experience, and

Cyclist and his bike, Fernand Léger

the relation between these two forms our consciousness. This is the body as a set of possibilities for action that we each experience for ourselves from the inside out. Based on his philosophy each of us is a physical body with a perspective of the world before turning into a conscious being. The Body forms its worldly experiences by interacting with other beings, other humans, and its habitat. Therefore, a lived body isn't just an object in the world but rather a way to manifest the universe.

The Body is the main tool through which cyclists move, explore, and experience their surrounding environment. During the riding, my body is the pivot of the world and develops my lived spatial knowledge. We build our experiences by engaging our entire body and muscles to pedal and produce energy that helps us experience the urban spaces around us. We learn to come to grips (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) with the spaces through a process of exploration and discovery. My capacity for understanding the city through cycling depends on the construction of my body (jones, 2005) which has its space.

> *"Before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space" (Lefebvre, 1991: 170)..*

We consider experience through the body, the embodied bodily engagement that organizes urban experience.

> *"The body senses as it moves, through kinaesthetic skill, merging sensory experience that informs one*

> *what the body is doing in space through the sensations of movement registered in joints, muscles, tendons and so on with intention and bodily memory…It combines with touch… sight, hearing, smell and other sensory impressions to perform the body's motion, as well as intense emotions" (Büscher and Urry 2009: 6).*

Cycling allows for an embodied meaning-making of place through contextual sensory experiences. In contrast to driving, riding a bike gives the person access to a different embodied knowledge of moving through the social and physical geographies of a place which enables an extended touch of the environment. As a cyclist, I am exposed to a broader urban environment, to urban sights, sounds, smells, feelings, and tastes in ways that differ from the experiences of car drivers who are separated from the outside environment in a moving private capsule. Bicyclists embody the knowledge of the energy used in mobility while drivers are more alienated from the energy consumed in their travel (Nixon, 2012). During cycling, the interactive relationship between the body and the environment can be quite intense in which the cyclist moves with the landscape. A 30-year-old young man explains this as:

> *"When riding a bicycle, you pay more attention to the problems, good and bad of an area; for example, a bicycle rider, who crosses somewhere, is more connected to the place than a car driver passing that same place…it seems that you are involved in all surrounding environments. You can also hear others' voices. Riding a bicycle is very different from sitting in a car, passing indifferently, and leaving things too fast. When you are riding your bike, you cannot be indifferent… you feel involved… you think about things… very closely."*

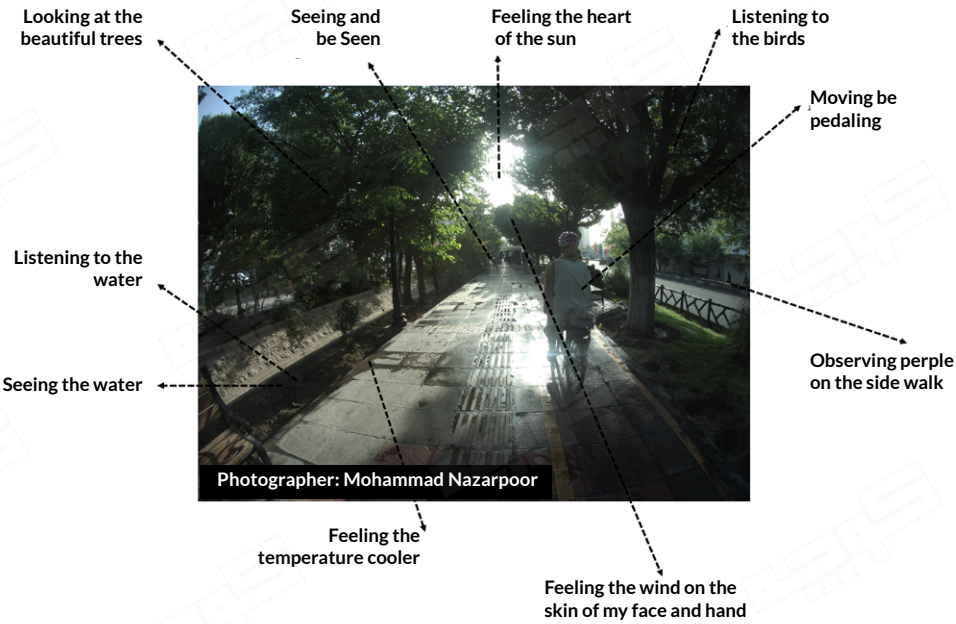
In addition, riding practice causes the bike to disappear from the user's perception, just like the cane in Merleau-Ponty's example of the blind

man, and the bike which was a tool to communicate with the urban places merges with the body of the cyclist. As Merleau-Ponty suggested, with skillful use the tool [my bike!] itself ceases to be a direct object of experience and becomes instead a medium through which we can experience the world- just as, by analogy, we experience through the body itself (Hale, 2017). In spaces that we ride frequently, we have an implicit bodily awareness of where objects are located, so we can move around easily without conscious effort.

> *"To habituate oneself to a hat, an automobile, or a cane [or my bike!] is to take up residence in them, or inversely, to make them participate in the voluminosity of one's own body. Habit expresses the power we have of dilating our being in the world, or of altering our existence through incorporating new instruments" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 145).*

Cycling is also a rhythmic practice. It requires a set of skills that are attained gradually; some of these skills are about coordination of the body and the bicycle and some are dependent on our relationship with the rhythmic order of the spaces we are exploring. The type of bicycle has a direct effect on the cycling rhythm. Cruiser bikes provide a slow rhythm due to their speed capacity while keeping the body in a vertical position because of their design; this makes these types of bicycles ideal for observing and understanding all details of urban spaces; whereas road bikes with their increased speed capacity and due to their aerodynamic design limit the landscapes.

According to the perspective, cycling has its unique cyclical rhythm, depending on our gender, physical abilities, and type of bicycle, which is engaged with the pulse and rhythm of the



city and creates a unique experience in and of urban spaces. The relation between the body, the kind of bicycle, and the dominant spatial order of different spaces define the ultimate rhythm of cycling. A 28-year-old young woman:

> *"Riding was hard at first and it really was. Special for me as a woman. We have to control a lot of things. In Tehran, the city for drivers, cycling was even harder than driving for women. But gradually, you learn how to ride and how to be survived on the streets".*

Cyclists enjoy being seen and shout their statements with the power of their muscles. During carnival cycling, we ride slowly, chatting to each other, looking around, and challenging the hegemonic order of the street. When we are riding as a group of bike riders everyone follows a line with a constant speed and our bodies learn from each other how to move. In this situation, I need to consider the bodily rhythms of others as well. It is a bodily challenge and a bodily protest on the street as a life stage. Our bodies manifest a critique of the belief that spaces should be functional and bodies should be docile.

Our Everyday mobility is an embodied, affective and emotional practice that creates diverse perspectives for understanding the city. This kind of mobile sense-making, experiencing, and meaningful engagement with the environment should be the focus of our attention in cycling research. ■

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Photographer: Rahman Mahmoodei

Tehran Bike Book

Social Ballet on Wheels; the Bicycle Puts Faith in Other People in Motion at City Scale

Drawing on autoethnographic methods to contrast experiences of riding a bike in Australia and the Netherlands, this essay explores the social negotiation of city space, revealing the transformative potential of active mobility to create more altruistic, joyful, and resilient transport systems.

K J Lee ←
Writer, producer and feminist ethnographer, Solidaria, Australia

▸ At home in Australia, I construct my own urban imaginaries mostly in solitude, kinaesthetically layering my existing knowledge of unconnected cycling infrastructure and my familiarity with the microgeography to create dynamic mental maps which get me wherever I wish to go. I am usually a lone traveller on these proprietary paths, not a predictable commuter radiating inwards by morning to a magnetic centre and outwards again by night. Instead, I move more laterally, jaggedly, threading myself through car traffic, parks, and places meant for pedestrians to sew my way together. I seek safe passage, veer towards sensory delight, navigate my social life via residential streets and run errands in stark industrial suburbs where other riders hardly venture. I occasionally interact, exchanging a smile or a gesture, yielding to let someone pass, but more often I am an observer, barely noticed, wending a solitary stream through the city.

Here, in Amsterdam, I am no longer alone when I ride. It is this difference that distinguishes experiences in the Dutch city, hinting at the transformative potential of social negotiation in shared space afforded by active mobility en masse.

"From the first day, I learn to discern, from behind, who is about to step into the bike path
and ring my bell before they do.
On the second day, a food delivery rider does the same for me as I dawdle near the path edge on foot.
I feel gratitude towards him, a warmth I can only direct at his back as he passes.
That simple sound has let me know a stranger has my best interests at heart.
These social graces can be gathered throughout the day."
(Journal, 2 July 2022)

This pair of wordless micro-interactions encapsulates the reciprocity of the place. I look out for others, and others look out for me. Here, it happens at scale. The reality of continually negotiated relationships between pedestrians and cyclists contests the official hierarchy of the city but presents evidence of a dynamic, social reinterpretation of the rules. People have come to their own agreement. The processes by which this occurs are opaque, with few explicit examinations in the literature. Hints can be found. Jensen (2010: 401) witnesses "normative codes of mobile action regulation" in an intricate study of social negotiation in city space elsewhere. Te Brömmelstroet and colleagues consider (2017: 2) the "radically different levels of interaction potential" offered by different modes of mobility.

I hear theorised by a Dutch person, and it is suggested by Schepers et al., (2017, citing Maas, 2011) that people here are skilled at anticipating how cyclists will behave even when they're driving cars because cycling is so commonplace that they are invariably cyclists themselves at other times. Their embodied experience improves how they accommodate people on wheels and makes intermodal interactions safer. The negative corollary that

driver inexperience with cycling may reduce empathy is mentioned by Marshall et al. (2017, citing Basford, 2002) and I feel I know it well from my home context where car use is hegemonic.

Lately, I've been pondering the shift in pedestrian responses to my polite electrified presence as a sudden and incommensurate scooter-fear is stoked by tabloid press in my low-density hometown. People previously charmed by the spectacle of my green cargo bike, who'd smile benevolently at my quirky transport choices, now screw up their faces and tense their stances as if I am an unwelcome threat. They spend most of their time in cars and tend to walk for leisure rather than transport, expecting exclusive use of plenty of space. They don't know what I've witnessed here with my own eyes and felt through my own muscles and synapses. They haven't seen how bodies can yield to each other as peacefully as water can flow.

That the pervasive cycling experience of the Dutch may mediate negotiation of conflicts between active modes, particularly where pedestrian crossings overlay bike paths, is suggested by the brief glimpses and momentary recognitions I observe in the streets of Amsterdam. Perhaps the pedestrians here, cyclists themselves at other times, understand it makes more sense for the rider to ride on, swerve around the walker, and remain in motion rather than stop. The imperative to not put your foot down when in this wheeled procession is described by some as crucial to the choreography of the city. On both sides, calculations of speed, momentum and volumes must play a part in this instantaneous citizen practice. To stop interrupts the flow; the city will not work that way.

After instances of trying to give pedestrians priority by stopping my bike, I learn this creates blockages and seems to confuse more than aid people. Instead, pedestrians look for a

gap; cyclists shift slightly or curve behind the anticipated path of a person walking. A rider approaching a pedestrian unaware of their presence rings their bell, but only when they judge it necessary. Of course, there are exceptions, muddles, tensions, and last-minute changes, but this arrangement, relying on the interactive skill and goodwill of participants, seems able to handle those complexities. The freedom to socially negotiate through the body and eyes afforded by active, outdoor modes of movement in an environment that requires it produces confidence that it can be done. The bicycle, as a mobility technology, a component of a system, and a symbol of a social contract, offers many freedoms, and this capacity to cooperatively renegotiate the rules, with apparent ease, with people you've never met, is one.

> *"After observing from on high, filming the balletic patterns of the city in motion, I move out into the flow on my bike. Approaching to my right, a woman, wearing a long black coat and a voluminous black and white chequered skirt, with grey hair piled high on her head and scarlet lipstick, gives me a tiny quick nod, permission to move in front of her.*
> *We merge in a smooth, continuous motion."*
> *(Journal, 7 July 2022)*

Individually, the interactions I experience here offer direct physiological and psychological gains. They help me avoid crashing into others and being injured. Synchronous positive interactions (smiles are common) release oxytocin, the social bonding hormone (Spengler et al., 2017). The feelings of physical and social security produced make me more relaxed, impacting other exchanges. On a society-wide scale, these system characteristics signify much more than immediate personal safety.

Each interaction is a reminder and a reinforcer in a positive feedback loop. Whenever I acknowledge and collaborate with another human in a split-second negotiation and decision, each of us allowing for the other, I give and receive trust. Here, many times a day is evidence that it is safe

to do so. As we flow past, between, and around each other, often with lightness and joy, the sense of being engaged in a grand consensual dance with complete strangers is stunning and occasionally overwhelming. More so when I think of the truculent suspicion that sometimes greets me as I carefully pass people on my bike at home. I wish more people there knew this was possible. Our brittleness could soften into curiosity, and we could take the tentative steps of unfamiliar dancers with bodies not yet warmed up, becoming warily willing to risk glancing contact.

It's not all bad in Perth. There are signs of a nascent sociality; knowing grins from others who've discovered the loveliness of a freewheeling life or kind looks from people who seem pleased to witness my daughter whisper in my ear as we ride, our bodies close throughout our everyday journeys. My city is a place where strangers greet each other in the street; we have what it takes to dance like the Dutch; we just haven't learnt the moves.

Stepping onto the urban dance floor is less frivolous than it sounds. My observations here, on the streets and elsewhere, affirm the possibility that everyday successes in these incidental social negotiations across modes can produce a collective predisposition towards trusting other people, constructing positive social norms and creating a more altruistic and resilient system.

The implications for relational quality and feelings of connectedness among 'multidimensional social effects...both on the user level and on the level of cities and societies' (te Brömmelstroet et al., 2017: 10) are as theoretically fascinating as they are socially intoxicating. My journal notations from riding in two cities on opposite sides of the world reflect the contrast between my home mobility context, where I often feel alone in a city dominated by anonymous, car-cocooned,

potentially hostile actors, and my active participation with many others, face-to-face in Amsterdam's common-place public stranger-care behaviour. Here, for all the imperfections of this place, I have been in the flow and felt that it is possible.

> "It's not magic. It's just a city.
> We can think about fairness, space quality, sharing, relaxation, hassle,
> choice, pace, social collaboration, and anything else we like,
> at any scale, in any place, and make things better anywhere."
> (Journal, 7 July 2022). ■

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Cyclists space themselves by unspoken agreement, Amsterdam (2022)

Cyclist entering the flow, Amsterdam (2022)
Photographer: KJ Lee

Riding Bicycles in the Netherlands

There are hidden decisions along every street of every city that shapes the choices people have to get around. If we claim to prioritize people walking and rolling, we must design for people walking and rolling.

Roy Symons ←

Engineer and Sustainable Transportation Specialist in British Columbia, Canada. He has authored three books: "Bike Lanes" "Except Bicycles" and "Fietspad".

▸ Many people believe that everyone rides a bicycle in the Netherlands because it's flat, but that is not the primary reason. People ride bicycles in the Netherlands because it's comfortable, safe, and often the quickest option. The rest of the world has a lot to learn.

Why do People Travel the Way They Do?

People choose their mode of transportation -whether it's walking, cycling, taking transit, or driving-based on their access to each mode and the ease with which it allows them to travel from origin to destination. The options available vary by location but are largely predetermined by decades of planning and land use decisions that shape the built environment and likely favour some modes over others. In North America, like many places around the world, transportation planners historically embraced the automobile and actively planned for more of them, predicting demand and providing for it, they

often didn't consider the negative effects it had on the livability of the city.

While it worked for a while, the freedom the automobile once provided has now become a burden for many, negatively impacting those with stressful commutes by car, but also those that don't travel by car. It is simply unsustainable for everybody to drive a car, we can't endlessly widen roads. We'd end up with only roads and nothing to drive to. Some might argue... that we are already witnessing this in some places today. with various crises guiding decision making at a higher level, the industry is evolving, albeit at different rates. More and more cities are realizing that widening roads indefinitely is not a viable solution, and instead, making more efficient use of the space they have. The bicycle is a more efficient way of moving in a city, and just one part of the solution to more livable cities.

Cycling Culture or Culture of Cycling?

The Netherlands does not have a cycling culture per se, rather, getting around by bicycle has simply become a part of their culture. It is a remarkable achievement for those of us looking in from the outside, but barely registers with those who live it every day. This wasn't always the case—the Netherlands was also heading towards car dominance, but reversed course in the 1970s. Infrastructure influences how we travel, and how we travel influences our daily life. Given the choice, would you choose the stress of an hour spent in freeway congestion or the joy of a twenty-minute bicycle commute? While at an individual level, personal choices play a part, the built environment has a huge influence on the collective ability of more people in the community to choose options that support their health and well-being.

Walking down many Dutch streets today, you will witness a continuous flow of people riding bicycles. They commute, shop, socialize. They carry their belongings in backpacks, crates, or on cargo bicycles. Some carry children, friends, partners. They are dressed for daily life, not

for a race track or an environment that requires personal protective equipment. They wear jeans, shorts, skirts, shirts, blouses, dresses, normal shoes, sandals, and even heels. If it's raining, they may ride with an umbrella. Most ride upright, taking in their surroundings and enjoying the journey, rather than racing to their destination as fast as possible.

Most other places are half a century behind the Netherlands. With that half a century spent further ingraining car-dependency into their cultures through both transportation and land use planning decisions, change now is like locking the barn door after the horses have bolted. Getting that horse back in the barn is a slow process, but it can be done. It requires brave decision-making from our leaders, and it will only happen piece by piece with every new infrastructure project.

Infrastructure that Reflects our Priorities

How does the bicycle become the default mode of transportation to the point that it barely registers? The best example of Dutch infrastructure

A continuous sidewalk and bike path in Delft, Netherlands. Photographer: Roy Symons

might be the continuous sidewalk and bike path- an obvious and simple way of building local street intersections. They should have never been built any other way.

This design aligns directly with the modal hierarchy that most cities in the world claim to adopt: people walking as the highest priority, followed by people riding bicycles, then people taking transit, goods movement, and finally people driving private cars. The continuous sidewalk is a perfect example of our modal hierarchy through design on the street.

In North America, pedestrians crossing a local street generally must negotiate a curb ramp, cross asphalt vehicle lanes while hoping turning drivers see them and climb back up the curb ramp to safety. The continuous sidewalk is exactly what it sounds like- a continuation of the sidewalk across the local street. As the driver now must cross the pedestrian realm, the onus is on them to take care, rather than the pedestrian to look out. The pedestrian has priority in both cases, but one design prioritizes pedestrians according to the modal hierarchy, while the other design simply avoids slowing down car drivers.

One design prioritizes pedestrians according to the modal hierarchy, while the other design simply avoids slowing down car drivers

Unaware of these design choices, you might never even think that there's a different way. Comparing the two, you would walk along one street barely noticing the side streets or the possibility of conflict, while on the other street, you carefully

check if a car is going to turn into you every hundred meters or so, the design has very real impacts on our comfort using the street, whether walking or riding a bicycle. Making design choices that reflect our societal priorities is essential to achieving the outcomes we collectively want and need. Anything less does not fulfil our aspirations.

Networks that Connect Us

When individual infrastructure projects join together, they create connected networks. This is what makes the Netherlands truly great. Today, you can travel safely and comfortably by bicycle anywhere in the country. The Netherlands have undertaken the pilot project, and its high mode share provides proof that it works.

To fully realize the bicycle's potential as a mode of transportation, to the point we see that continuous flow of people on bicycles, we need complete networks where you don't even have to plan a route in advance. You simply know that there is safe way to get there on your bike and know that it will be well-signposted to your destination. Most cities are still in the very early stages of building their bicycle networks. It takes time, it's taken the Netherlands 50 years, and they're still working on it. In fact, they're likely still investing more than most other countries. As other cities expand their networks, they enable more and more people to make trips by bicycle.

The connections within and between cities may not be possible everywhere, considering the greater distances such as those in North America. However, if our metro regions and outlying suburbs were to build Dutch-levels of connected bicycle routes that are comfortable for everyone, we'd not only see Dutch levels of ridership, we'd free children from the back seat, we'd enable their independence, we'd give those that can't drive a car a more equal footing in society, we' reduce car parking demands, and we'd reduce congestion for those that still need or want to drive.

From Cyclists to People Riding Bicycles

"Cyclist" is often considered a negative or dehumanizing term in North America, hence the shift to "people riding bicycles". **Cyclist,** often preceded with expletives, say when holding a driver up for fractions of a second in a shared lane is not uncommon.

Riding around the Netherlands, the infrastructure is not always perfect, legacy infrastructure such as painted lanes and even door zone bike lanes are still common, yet the fact that most people ride a bicycle at some point, means where you do interact with car drivers, they are likely not looking down on you as a sub-class of human, just a person riding a bicycle. Building connected networks of safe and comfortable infrastructure will enable more people to get around and undertake their day-to-day needs by bicycles. Furthermore, with the increasing adoption of e-bikes removing barriers for some, the argument that people only ride bicycles in the Netherlands because it is flat will become less and less relevant. ■

Make it safe and we'll connected and people will ride all year, no matter the weather. Photographer: Roy Symons

The Role of Human Infrastructure in Shifting the Way We Move in Our Cities

If we are to successfully combat the many challenges caused by car dominance in cities, a shift in mobility cultures is essential. In order to achieve such a shift, we need to strengthen the human infrastructure of cycling, alongside transforming the physical infrastructure of our streets.

Lucas Snaije ←
Research & Advocacy Manager at BYCS

As cities around the world embrace cycling as an increasingly important part of their transport strategies, urban policies to encourage it are still predominantly focused on urban planning and design measures, in line with the mantra "build it and they will come". If we are to successfully combat the many urban challenges caused by car dominance, a dramatic shift in mobility cultures is essential. In order to achieve such a shift, we need to think about strengthening the human infrastructure of cycling, alongside transforming the physical infrastructure of our streets. This concept focuses on behavioural change initiatives that can support the empowerment of all people through cycling.

Ignoring how the attitudes and cultural values transmitted to us at an early age shape our understanding of the world, and how these socio-cultural elements in turn shape our mobility behaviours and cultures, hinders our ability to achieve truly inclusive cycling cities. There are barriers to

cycling that infrastructure simply does not solve, such as perceptions, access, ability, or awareness. Failure to account for such barriers will continue to exclude those who would benefit the most from cycling. Even with the best protected bike lane outside their door, if a person doesn't know how to ride a bicycle, can't afford one, or doesn't perceive cycling as a mode of transportation that is for them, they aren't going to use it.

Human infrastructure is a relatively new concept when applied to cycling, and suggests looking beyond the built environment to pay closer attention to the social attitudes and knowledge networks that shape mobility. This emergent framework is especially helpful as we build on the momentum of the current cycling boom. It can reveal the need for initiatives that reinforce cycling cultures in a way that allows diverse individuals to access and perceive cycling as a viable, safe, and desirable mode of transportation.

Understanding how to facilitate the strengthening of human infrastructure from both a policy perspective, and through greater support of existing movements working to engage with communities, is important to make cycling accessible to all and place more emphasis on barriers to access. Greater attention to human infrastructure can help shape a new framework to ensure all populations feel that cycling is a strong modal choice for them. Failure to account for such barriers will continue to exclude those who would benefit the most from cycling as daily transportation.

BYCS is a young, international NGO based in Amsterdam, with a regional office in New Delhi, India. We work with activists, NGOs, and government institutions around the world to promote inclusive cycling cultures, and develop programs that can accompany the needed changes in our streetscapes. Our mission is to support and scale community-led urban change through cycling, through this lens of human infrastructure.

As a Dutch organisation, we understand from history that alongside dramatic changes in the way our cities are thought and planned, the role of civil society, political will, and programs that encourage new ways of moving in

the city are essential. Amsterdam wasn't always as it is today. Indeed, during the 1950s & 1960s, the city was becoming very car-centric, and it was thanks to social movements and attention and action from politicians that Amsterdam succeeded in transforming itself into the human-centric city it is today. Initiatives like closing streets to cars, and developing mass rides and car-free Sundays were very useful in bringing about this change.

Cities around the world often look to Amsterdam and Copenhagen as examples of cycling cities. "We aren't Amsterdam" is also often heard as a defeatist argument when trying to promote cycling in car-centric environments. Change can however happen fast, and the COVID-19 pandemic is a clear reflection of this. Around the world, cities have embraced cycling agendas like never before, and people have started cycling spontaneously in much larger numbers. Cycling has also shined during other crises. In Mexico City for example, after the 2017 earthquake, bicycles provided a solution to move through the damaged neighbourhoods. In Lebanese cities, the bicycle is emerging as a solution to combat the exorbitant costs of fuel. It is indeed one of the most reliable, resilient, cheap and efficient modes of transport that brings many benefits in terms of health, sustainability and economic empowerment.

If cities around the world embrace cycling and focus on changing streetscapes while also strengthening the human infrastructure of cycling, we believe that rapid changes in our mobility habits will be observed, and that a higher quality of life for all urban residents can be achieved. We do not believe the solution is to "Amsterdamify", however with proper civic participation and attention to learnings and successes from different parts of the world, we are confident that all cities can reduce car culture and become greener, healthier, and more sustainable urban communities. ■

Bicycle Bus in Barcelona

Photographer: Calvox & Periche

The Soft Power of Cycling's Public Image

The focus of our attention should be on changing the perception of the bicycle, especially in contexts with inadequate cycling infrastructure. The core concept of this essay revolves around how we can transform the bicycle into a symbol of youth-led culture.

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Cycling is increasingly hailed as one solution to many issues our cities are facing, including pollution, struggling economies and inequitable access to transportation. The best way to increase cycling's modal share is by building well designed and inclusive infrastructure to support it. However, despite minimal costs in comparison to other transport investments, advocacy for the right government spending can be challenging. This is due to the fact that demands for safe cycling infrastructure can be perceived as coming from a small yet vocal group, and that the broader population is hesitant to start cycling, especially without the right infrastructure in place.

Therefore to increase cycling rates where infrastructure is not already in place we need to turn to other methods that make the desire to cycle immediately apparent. We can change the perception of the bicycle, both with tools like municipal advertising, and also by turning the bicycle into a status symbol, embedding it in popular youth-led culture.

Aspirational Mobility

In the quest to create demand for the bicycle, it is perhaps both surprising and obvious that part of the answer may be found in the automotive industry. At its advent the car overtook the bicycle as an embodiment of freedom, power, wealth, and therefore social status. The more impressive the car, the more impressive the man; and high performance racing is the pinnacle of this phenomenon. Where the auto industry's genius lies is that their marketing has created a link between this elite strata of driving and the average person's 3 door hatchback. By driving any car one is not just driving, but taking a place on the conveyor of social status that reaches all the way up to champagne soaked Formula 1 drivers in Monaco. In essence, racing is an incredibly effective marketing tool.

For cycling too, racing is currently where the big marketing budgets and exposure are concentrated; however there is a lack of conversion of this brand influence into the realm of cycling for mobility. Where car racing engages with popular culture at large, and it's not uncommon to see a racing car in an advert for a regular car, cycle racing often remains insular and stubbornly elitist. Although there is marketing for urban ranges of bikes, it is kept separate (and disinteresting for many demographics) from that of sport and recreation. It's unsurprising then that the public, young people especially, don't look to bicycles as a mobility with any real social currency on the streets, but to cars and motorbikes instead.

Recently however, this dogma is being tackled by a skateboard brand and an innovative marketing effort. Through 2020 EF Pro-Cycling Team collaborated with skate collective turned high fashion brand Palace. They set off a proverbial paint-bomb in the peloton by launching their eye-catching new kit like a streetwear drop. This new collection turned the eyes of every hypebeast onto the Giro d'Italia which usually wouldn't garner a glance. Making the connection here between bicycle racing and popular youth-led street culture has the knock-on potential to open

minds to the idea of a connection between bicycle racing and bicycle mobility. It takes a more status based version of cycling onto the streets, and enables the bicycle's entry into the cultural consciousness of this new demographic, shifting from irrelevant to aspirational.

Cultural Forerunners

Alongside streetwear, enormous influence on youth opinion and habits comes from the arts, particularly music. Stereotypically displaying clout with flashy cars, cycling has been creeping into the zeitgeist of hiphop in recent years. Artists such as Loyle Carner and A$AP Ferg have released videos centred around riding bicycles; and a recent Frank Ocean song literally opines the brilliance of biking. It could be argued that much of this is in pursuit of a nostalgic aesthetic rather than the promotion of cycling as a sustainable transport solution, but embedding the bicycle in contemporary youth culture is an important step towards making it desirable.

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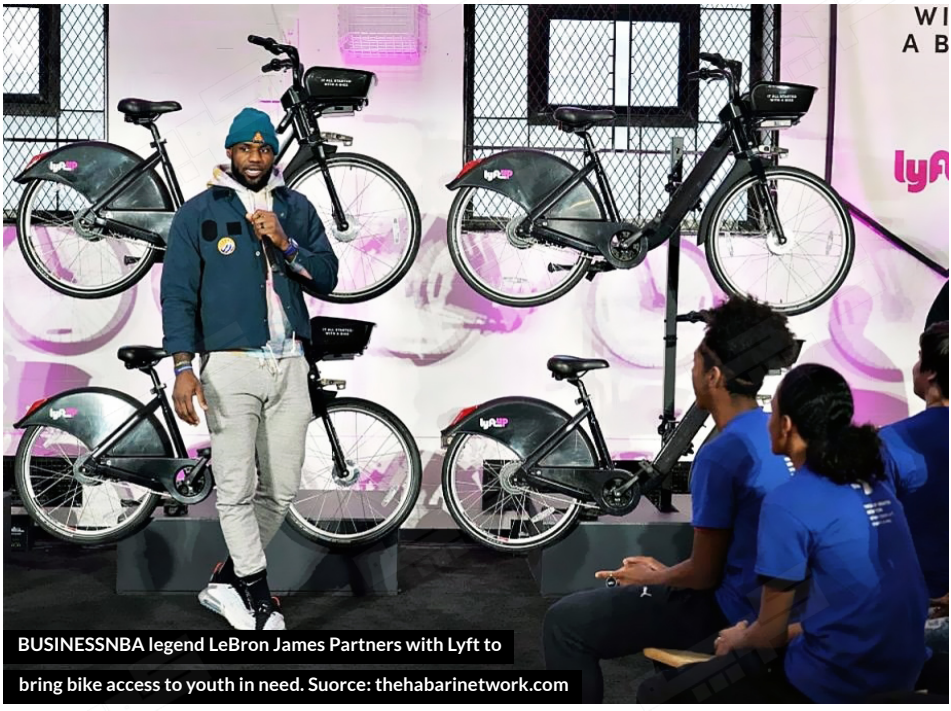
A further step has been taken by Tyler the Creator, another hiphop artist. He is not only known to be a fan of cycling to get around, but is actively using his creative platform and influence to encourage it. His brand Golf Wang collaborated with SE bikes to release the Golf Flyer, instantly increasing the desirability of the bicycle and nudging the idea of owning a bicycle as a status symbol rather than a car into the consciousness of his fanbase.

Screenshot from EF-Palace-Rapha promo video



BUSINESSNBA legend LeBron James Partners with Lyft to bring bike access to youth in need. Suorce: thehabarinetwork.com

A Platform for Empowerment

Using celebrity platforms for empowerment is a strategy well demonstrated by the basketball player Lebron James. Going further still than Tyler the Creator's brand collaboration, James has founded UNINTERRUPTED, a media platform that champions young Black voices and athletes who want to do more than just play. It connects them with creators who want to share knowledge, and companies who want to harness the power of the people for good; all wrapped in the shiny skin of a lifestyle brand. It has already produced some powerful work for causes including saving the endangered Leimert Park in Los Angeles and school outreach programs in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Platforms like this are consciously fighting for social justice, and leveraging cycling to achieve a vision of mobility justice. Young people today are more attuned to politics and sustainability than ever before, and mobility's part in our right to the streets is becoming an increasingly visible and politicised issue.

At the beginning of 2020 Lyft seemingly had the same thought. They worked with James and UNINTERRUPTED to promote their bike-share service with a new campaign called LyftUp. Based on the statistic that "40% of Lyft rides start or end in low-income areas", the campaign film opens with James' deep voice speaking the lines, "You might think it's just a bike. But you'd be surprised how far it can take you." By working with James through UNINTERRUPTED the brand strategists are positioning the bike as a tool for social advancement, for freedom and for opportunity; and simultaneously giving bike riding social credit. This led to impressive results, with 13,700 people signing up to ride bikes by March 2020. It is easy to be cynical of a multinational tech giant like Lyft dressing

marketing as empowerment, but in today's world, time is running out for other avenues to have the potential to achieve a similar level of impact.

Embracing Irrationality

Humans are, for better or worse, irrational creatures. However this apparent flaw doesn't have to be a negative—without it we might never challenge the (currently car-centric) status quo to achieve change necessary to survive, let alone thrive. At present, it's absolutely true that there are cities in which to cycle is not unreasonably seen as irrational due to traffic danger, pollution and inconvenience; but people still get on their bikes and pedal every day, despite a lack of supporting infrastructure or services. To push investment in more infrastructure, and get more people cycling, we need more irrational people getting on their bikes in the first place.

The impetus to do something irrational can be ignited when that thing appears desirable. If cycling becomes a status symbol embedded in aspirational popular culture, particularly that which is created by and for the youth, it is more likely to be adopted en masse. The resulting expanded audience of risk-takers and forerunners set trends for the rest of society to follow. This bolsters the overall demand for cycling and subsequently for infrastructure to create an equitable cycling environment for all demographics.

A focus on perception of cycling is therefore an urgent step in the journey to mass popularisation. The modal shift that cities need to thrive won't happen any time soon without an engineered shift in this intangible realm of cultural influence[1]. ■

1. This essay was originally published by BYCS and can be accessed here. Due to its innovative and valuable insights, we are republishing it in Kooche in collaboration with the author.

My Bike Experience from Barcelona to Amsterdam

Having the chance to spend three weeks in Amsterdam, immersing myself in its cycling culture, this essay is a reflection of my thoughts on what really is important in a city that is worth living and the role of the bike in achieving it while appreciating the good aspects of my homeland.

Gemma Simón–i–Mas ←
PhD student on Cycling Children at City Lab Barcelona

I was so excited to start cycling when I got my rental bike! The upright position felt very comfortable, and the big amount of space for cycling felt cozy and relaxing. On this first ride, I felt that there were no traffic rules for the bike, and that I was the queen of the city. Eye contact and speed regulation was enough not to collide with other people. The first thought was that this sense of security was to to having an extensive cycling space and less space for motor vehicles; this way, different bicycle speeds could coexist without stopping the bike flow. Cars were scarce, and the few that were present were gong very slow, and at that speed they could also negotiate the right of way with other modes of transport.

Days advanced and I was still understanding how I should behave as a cyclist. I was in a couple of situations when angry people shouted things at me that I could not understand. I have written in my notes a couple of times: people seem to self regulate. And I believe that this is what it was happening,

I was not behaving as expected according to dutch cycling conventions and they were warning me. They were educating me. It seems that self regulation is a continuous process in which cyclists negotiate their right of way with informal rules and by doing and warning they teach those rules to less experts cyclists. Creating an environment of active negotiation that keeps cycling interactions safe. As some authors have noted, the thought that cyclists do not always follow the rules make them alert and prevents collisions from happening (Larsen, 2017).

Days passed and the excitement for an amazing cycling infrastructure turned into normality. It was so easy to ride in the flow of cyclists that felt like natural. However, I noticed that things were more difficult for people walking. Social and physical infrastructure for cycling was defficient. Informal rules were not made for people walking, that were coutinuously shielding even when they had priority, and infrastructure had not much safe zebra crossings and made them take detours. For example, the intersection of Visserplein, that we studied closely in class, had important improvements for cyclists but was no good to make by foot.

This developed a small crisis in me. I came here to learn from the forefront country on cycling use because I think that bikes should be the future of cities, and yet this place had situations that I did not like. And then, the words of Marco came into my mind: the bike as a symbol. We learnt that in the 70s, when dutch claimed for a safe cycling infrastructure, the bike was only one part of the movement. The bike was only a symbol of simplicity to contest the capitalist system that was growing. Therefore, the bike should not be seen as an end but a means to the real aim. We do not want to fill the streets with bikes just because we like them so much, bikes can also create problems with pedestrians, as I experienced.

What is the ultimate aim them? I started engaging with the promotion of the bike because it helps to overcome the problems of my city: air pollution, climate change, poor physical and mental healt, democratic use

of space and social cohesion. Those are the ultimate objectives that I want to pursue. And the bike is a tool that tackles those problems but it is not the only one. The promotion of the bike can also hinder some of the aims of communty wellbeing, as I previously mentioned with people walking. Therefore it is important to have in mind the actual aim and that the bike is just a symbol.

This made me think that even the layout of many of the streets in Amsterdam was not that transformative. Taking a look at the urban space, the design looks very familiar to the one I already know: cars in the center, then bike paths, and finally sidewalks. With much more space allocated to bikes and so much less cars. But still, the outline of most streets did not look much different.

But looking more into detail I could see examples that I liked much more. In a suburban area I found a bidirectional bike path shared with people walking in the middle of the street. At each side there was one way lane for cars, and finally the houses. This looked much better! Similar to the Rambles in Barcelona, where people walk in the centre of the street. The centrality of the space is usually given to private motorized vehicles, and I think that it is something important to claim. Enjoying a street from its center gives a sense of ownership that it is totally different from the feeling that cyclists and people walking have, always relegated to the borders.

Putting people in the center of the space, regardless the mode they are using, allows for more interactions. And I found another example in the square of Domplein in Utrecht. This square is a completely shared space for people walking, bikes and buses. With no lines in the floor and hardly a signal post, people are to self-regulate their way. It had enough space for walking, enjoying the square, and keeping the cycling flow (te Brömmelstroet et al., 2021).

Another interesting example of Utrecht was an intersection of two bike paths that has very high use. The way they solved possible collisions among cyclists and between cyclists and other modes was to remove any paint and signal of regulation. This did not mean that there were no norms but that the norms had to be built among the users of the intersection. This is a wonderful way to promote social cohesion, and what Marco te Brömmelstroelt refers to as exposure to diversity.

These are still a few examples but I think they point towards the need for spaces that are shared, with minimal formal rules, that allow for community self-organization. These examples returned my excitement as the first time that I hopped on my rental bike in Amsterdam. ■

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My cycling experience in Amsterdam

Photographer: Gemma Simón-i-Mas

A Green and Pleasant Land: Nature and Cycling in the English West Country

Everyone's cycling story is different. This essay tells one such story, starting with rural rides to school, continuing with the bike central to urban mobility and countryside escapes and finishing with research findings about cycling and nature in Bristol, UK.

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▸ This special issue asks "What does a bicycle mean to you?" and I would like to respond with some personal reflections and by sharing some findings from my research about cycling and nature. Having grown up in a rural, agricultural area of the English Westcountry where I was required to ride a bike on country roads to get to school, I understand the perspective of those for whom cycling is not a choice but a necessity. In addition, I know that although the countryside through which I cycled now appears idyllic from the comfort of a car, the reality wasn't always pleasant, with mud and muck, apparently aggressive and unchained dogs, potholes and farming smells to contend with, not to mention the physical effort of getting up the steep hills. So, my first and earliest answer might have been that while cycling could mean freedom and a modicum of adventure, mainly it meant effort, inconvenience, fear (of the dogs) and sometimes shame (about getting splashed with mud or simply not having a more mainstream transport option).

A winter morning scene witnessed on my ride to the university

Photographer: Mel Cairns

However, after moving to a city, beginning work for a sustainable transport charity and being surrounded with colleagues and friends for whom cycling was not just normal but usually the optimal way to get around, I began to love the bike. I used it to get to work, the shops, to see friends and for day trips to the countryside and holidays in France and the Netherlands; I even helped to organise a cycling festival. The many hills and the prevalent rain in my city were inconvenient but didn't detract from the central place of the bike as my default mobility, physical activity and source of everyday joy, adventure and discovery. I imagine this sort of transformative social and cultural support for cycling that I experienced at this workplace might be similar to that of high-cycling countries such as Denmark; it is certainly rare in the UK. Here, cycling rates have been extremely low for decades and cycling for transport in particular is something that many people will not consider, perceiving it to be dangerous, impractical or simply not for them.

During my Master's degree, I learned about **nature connectedness**, that is feeling that one is part of nature, and how it is positively associated with wellbeing and environmentally-friendly behaviours. I also learned about behaviour change and how cycle promotion is commonly framed around the financial and fitness benefits of cycling to work rather than the joy and adventure of leisure rides to the countryside. I looked for research about nature connection in relation to cycling and found little, which was surprising to me because nature was such a huge part of my cycling experiences. The local countryside provided a backdrop for challenging yet restorative and joyful group rides and, particularly during the pandemic, solo rides to explore new greenspaces closer at hand. So, I conducted a mixed methods research project exploring

potential relationships between nature connection and cycling in my home city of Bristol.

The project involved a survey of over 400 local people, some cyclists and some not, and in-depth interviews with seven of the respondents. I found that nature was an important aspect of cycling for some participants, like me, and for others, particularly those who cycled for transport but not recreation, it really wasn't. Participants who cycled for recreation were more connected to nature than those who didn't. And although nature could not overcome the barriers to cycling described by non-cycling participants, thinking about cycling in nature did make cycling more appealing for them.

Several potential relationships between nature connection and cycling emerged during the analysis, supported by the literature. For example, cycling created opportunities for some participants to access and/or experience nature in ways that they might not otherwise have been able to. They described memorable encounters with wild animals, the embodied pleasures of riding to natural places rather than driving and the magical experiences of familiar places transformed by seasonal changes, darkness or unusual weather conditions. In addition, nature and cycling had much in common for the participants, both being a source of enjoyment and wellbeing, the spaces for which they felt were under threat in various ways and therefore required protection. Cycling in natural spaces could offer empowerment and could enhance the pleasure taken in the ride, but unfortunately these spaces sometimes felt contested; there were anxieties and stresses associated with sharing natural spaces with pedestrians who perhaps did not respect the rights of cyclists to be there.

A particularly interesting finding concerned the concept of nature connectedness mentioned above. **Five pathways** have been identified that can increase people's nature connectedness: sensory contact, emotion, meaning, beauty and compassion. Bearing in mind that being more nature connected is associated with more environmentally-friendly behaviours, I was interested to find

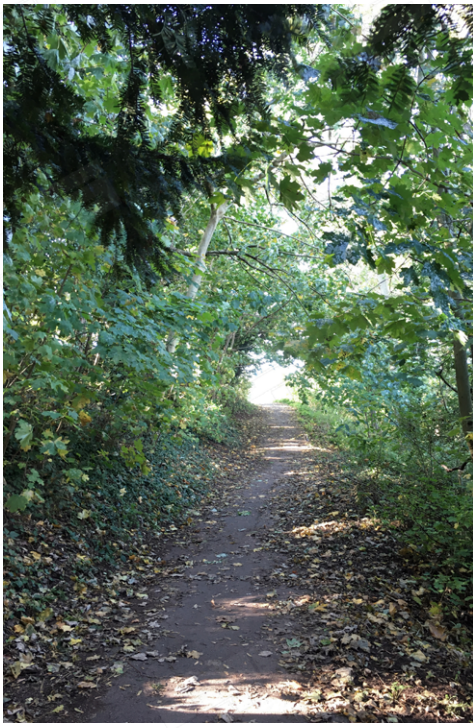
out whether these pathways could be activated during cycling. The interview participants described several situations where they appeared to have experienced one or more of these pathway processes during their cycle rides in green spaces and more rural places, although much less so during urban utility rides. These pathway experiences also seemed to be particularly memorable and satisfying aspects of cycle rides.

So how these findings might be used? Well, first I must acknowledge the limited scale and resources of the project and suggest that further research explore some of these things with greater depth and robustness and in other geographical contexts. Nature, and indeed understandings of the rural countryside, are particularly subjective and culturally produced concepts and in many countries bring with them far more significant barriers and dangers than in my study area. Nevertheless, many of the findings, particularly concerning the ways in which nature enhances enjoyment and wellbeing during cycling, are supported by the literature I have been reviewing for my doctoral research exploring "nature cycling" practices in more depth. I hope I have provided a different perspective which foregrounds the sensory and affective pleasures of cycling in natural environments and prompts consideration of what the concept of nature cycling might look like in other cities, towns and rural areas.

In particular, the five pathways to nature connectedness might be considered in the design of cycling spaces, in order to increase nature connectedness among cyclists, improving their wellbeing and perhaps also their ride experiences. Furthermore, greater consideration of how norms of use are defined in nature cycling spaces to avoid conflict with, or marginalisation of cyclists by, pedestrians and other users would make nature cycling more appealing for a wider range of people. In terms of cycle promotion, more research is needed

to assess whether nature cycling could be deployed in order to encourage non-cyclists to try cycling but my small number of non-cyclist interview participants indicated that nature cycling was the only type of cycling that they could imagine doing. The enhanced enjoyment of cycling in natural environments might also help with improving the maintenance of cycling behaviours, perhaps by promoting new and varied nature cycling routes on a regular basis in cities as well as at rural cycle tourism destinations.

I appreciate that both nature and cycling probably have different socio-cultural significance in Iran and that a perspective from England might be somewhat irrelevant. However, my literature review has yet to identify any studies on cycling and nature from the Middle East so I wonder whether the role of nature in cycling has been somewhat overlooked there too? Or perhaps there is much from which I could learn. I'd love to hear from researchers in Iran and around the region who are exploring the role of nature in sustainable mobilities or anyone involved in nature cycling cultures and practices. ■



These images, taken on cycle trips near Bristol, UK, show that open landscapes and immersion in nature can be part of cycling experiences. Photographer: Mel Cairns

Faster than the Wind: Women Cycling in the Middle East

Since bicycles first appeared in the Middle East in the 1880s women have been at the forefront of ridership. This essay shines light on some of the women cyclists and the history and culture they have created and keep creating.

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▸ It is a cool autumn morning and Fatma Aliye Topuz is riding downhill. The wind is blowing across her face, the air is crisp, the light filters through the trees. She is gliding fast, past houses, market stalls, government buildings, schools. Her legs and lungs are powering her forward, and she feels a loving sense of movement. In 1890s Constantinople most cyclists were young men of means or education but Topuz, often in a flowing white dress, rides her three-wheeled bicycle through the narrow cobblestone alleys and the new airy boulevards. Men jeer and sometimes try to pull her off her vehicle and prevent her from continuing on her journey but she ignores them. Pushing harder, peddling faster, she leaves them behind and sails on.

Born in 1862, like most women of her time and place, she has known from birth familial and societal restrictions and prohibitions. These included an arranged marriage to an

army officer who forbade her to read books in foreign languages and demanded sons but Fatma created a life of independence and autonomy, as an activist for women's rights and a successful journalist and novelist. Until her death in 1936, Topuz, a devout Muslim who opposed Ataturk's secularization reforms, kept creating female heroines who, like her, also discover rooms of their own in a male dominated world.

For Fatma Aliye Topuz and many other women across the Ottoman ruled Middle East the struggle for liberation was aided by the bicycle, a vehicle that became, a bearer of wonder and pleasure, a path of personal and societal transportation and transformation. Their lives with bicycles are an important part of the emerging feminist movement in the region as well as of the early history of cycling. In this article I would like to salute some of women who rode then and others riding now.

The first cyclists in the region were western travellers, starting in the 1880s, including several women, most notably globe-trotting American Annie Londonderry in 1894-95. The strange contraption and its magical powers elicited curiosity and a desire by many to hop on one. European bicycle manufacturers quickly noted the potentially lucrative market and advertised widely in local publications models for men, women and children. Due to the vehicles' high cost, Constantinople's first riders were predominantly European merchants and diplomats and upper- and middle-class locals. As cost decreased, students and intellectuals embraced the vehicle. Cyclists soon appeared in other large regional urban centers and in port cities, locals that enjoyed diverse populations, vibrant economic and cultural exchanges and many citizens who adapted European forms of entertainment and mixed gender sociability, conditions conducive to the introduction of bicycles.

While most early riders were male, there were always women cyclists. These included rebellious and free-spirited Princess Taj al-Saltaneh (1883-1936), daughter of Persia's ruler, Naser al-Din Shah. Given away in an arranged marriage at age eight, the princess went on to become a critic of the monarchy and an advocate for women's rights. She divorced

her husband, had an abortion, removed her veil, dressed in western cloths, painted and played the violin. An advocate of education for both sexes as a path to knowledge and progress, she also called for adapting the western ideals of "freedom", "equality" and "justice."

An 1896 readers' spirited debate in the pages of the Journal de Salonique testifies to this changing sense of self. After an editorial claimed that local women are only interested in finding a husband, a female reader responded, describing an excursion she took, alone, undeterred by the roads' poor state and the winter mud. She chose to end her ride with a visit to a coffeehouse, enjoying a drink and reading newspapers, completing a day of independence.

The slow but steady growth in the number of women cyclists was given a humorous nod in Lebanon's Lisān al-ḥāl's newspaper in a 1897 anecdote describing a conversation between two women.

> *"I will buy a new bicycle today.*
> *- Why?*
> *Because last Friday, ten bicycles ran over me, made me fall onto the ground and tear my clothes. I want to try now this great pleasure of running over somebody."*

As elsewhere, opposition to cycling was quick to appear, mostly from conservative elements and religious fundamentalists who often labeled it "the Devil's Chariot". Several Muslim religious authorities designated it as bid'ah (any technological innovation deemed heretical.) In Yemen and Saudi Arabia bans on all cycling were enacted. In other places most of the attacks- physical assaults on riders, in the press and via laws- were directed at women cyclists. Claims that cycling harms reproductive organs, encourages sexual permissiveness and

leads to the destruction of family and society were common. Behind the opposition was also the desire to confine women to their homes and to prevent all unsupervised meetings between men and women.

Still, women cycling increased and bicycles became prevalent in studio photography and in children's magazines, a symbol of middle class respectability and openness to new ideas, a (in the words of historian Paul Smethurst) "talisman for modernity." As with their western sisters, Ottoman women cyclists helped change contemporary mores. By travelling un-chaperoned the bicycle offered a new sense of freedom of mobility that extended to other areas of life. Replacing heavy and restrictive dresses with athletic garb was one important measure of this change.

The 1923 collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of Republican Turkey were a boon to greater women's participation in public life and greater visibility in public space. The latter included a dramatic increase

Fatma Aliye Topuz

in the number of girls and women cycling, encouraged by the inclusion of physical education classes in schools and more positive portrayals of female riders in the press, literature and films.

In Palestine and Lebanon, British and French rule also led to more women cyclists, mostly among the urban and educated elites. The Jewish women's cycling community in Palestine was bolstered by the arrival in the 1930s of German and Central European refugees, many ardent cyclists.

Across the region, the decades from the 1950s to the 2000s have seen slow but steady increases in ridership. Periods of greater growth coincided with securitization, openness to western technology and values and improvement in the status of women. These included 1950s Lebanon, early 1960s Iraq and Iran before the Shah's fall. During these times, newspapers regularly carried advertisements for well known British brands, for men and women, and articles featuring stylish woman on bicycle outings.

In the new Millennium, strides have been made in the number of women cyclists, especially in Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and Turkey. Bisikletli Kadın □nisiyatifi, Turkey's first women's cycling group, was established in 2017. Through events, talks and rides, with chapters in several cities, it has increased public awareness of challenges and accomplishments and created a supportive community. Hundreds of women from across the region (along with from other lands) have embarked on Follow the Women rides for peace. Cycling through Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine the women highlight the suffering and need for justice. Rides carrying food to refugees and material aid and support to Palestinians have also taken place.

Iran and Saudi Arabia remain however lands where being a woman cyclist is difficult and often dangerous. A 2013 Saudi

ban on women cycling, enacted and enforced by The Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and The Prevention of Vice was finally overturned but social mores and local laws banning such activity are still powerful. Women must wear Abayas, ride only in parks or other confined areas and be accompanied by a male guardian. Verbal and physical attacks on women who dare to disobey these rules are common.

In Iran, a 2016 Fatwa by some relegious leaders banned women cycling as "Riding a bicycle often attracts the attention of man and exposes the society to corruption, and thus contravenes women's chastity, and it must be abandoned." Local governments have threatened "Islamic punishment" of violators. Still, women across the Islamic Republic have resisted these edicts, despite arrests. The struggle to ride in the two countries found powerful filmic expression in the 2000 Iranian film "The Day I Became a Woman" and the 2012 Saudi "Wadjda". Future riders will be inspired by early trailblazers and by contemporaries like Engineer Roudha Alawadi, co-founder of the UAE Cycling Girls group; Baghdad artist

Marina Jaber whose initial ride, part of an art project, blossomed into rides of dozens of women and men; Iranian Poupeh Mahdavi Nader who has been cycling around the globe, raising funds for refugees in the name of love, friendship and global peace; Saudi sisters Fatima and Yasa Al-Bloushi, Dina Al-Nasser and Anoud Aljuraid who founded the HerRide group in Jeddah; And Sana'a photographer Bushra Al-Fusail who started the Yemeni Women Bike Group.

The latter organization drew to its initial 2014 ride only 14 women, of which ten never cycled before, but, in the words of its founder -"Biking was our way of showing that nothing can stop us- not bombing, not cultural taboos, this is our right; we have a right to live and the right to movement." These cycling projects challenge social norms and legal restrictions and open discussions about women's lives, planting seeds of independence and rebellion. The wheels of fire keep turning. ■

Community Bike Workshops and Bicycle Repair: the Global Picture

There is a global movement to "close the circle" of citizen bicycle use and repair, in community bicycle workshops where people repair their own bikes, or help others, also recycling parts and components. In the process, enthusiasm for cycling is increased, friendships flourish, and in a small way, urban automobility is challenged.

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Introduction

Across the world, bicycles are being repaired. Millions of them. This is because although a bike frame and most metal components can endure for more than half a century, other components like tyres, inner tubes, brake pads, grips, cables and bearings wear out. In addition, enthusiasts want new models, or more bikes to suit different purposes, abandoning their old ones (Batterbury & Dant, 2019). Children outgrow their bikes, and adults have different requirements as they age. Some bikes are abandoned because owners lack repair skills or money to fix them. Even in the Netherlands and Denmark, the two Western nations with the highest bike modeshare (Ton et al. 2019), there is still a bicycle "waste stream".

While repair seems to happen everywhere, there are big differences across the world in repair practices, spread across workshops, back yards, shops, and on the streets. At least in

A workshop repair session with the Council, at WeCycle, Australia (2022)

Photographer: JS

Western nations and across some Asian cities, there is always a stock of broken or un-used bikes, exceeding the rate at which they can be repaired by individuals. But across much of Africa, very few bikes are left broken or abandoned: they are useful, and demand is great in "cycling cities" like Ouagadougou and Bamako.

If bicycle repair is a feature of the world's cities, this is partly because cycling is experiencing a revival as part of the politics of demand for low-carbon modes of transport, which are now deemed an absolute necessity. Globally, even where automobility dominates urban transportation, austerity, inequality and unemployment still push people to seek cheaper options to meet their urban mobility needs. Anger about urban vehicle pollution and dangers, especially noticeable in heavily polluted cities like Tehran and Bangkok (Marks 2020) can push some residents to embrace cycling voluntarily. We argue that given the health benefits from cycling, bikes need to be part of the architecture of a thriving city (OUVEMA 2023). We cannot wait for the mass rollout of high tech mobility solutions like private Electric Vehicles (EVs), and more advanced and efficient public transport.

In this short article we tackle the weight of the bicycle repair task through exploring a global movement to "close the circle" of citizen bicycle use and repair. Not in bike shops, which do a reliable job in most cities across the world where people cycle, but in community-led initiatives called "bike kitchens" or "community bicycle workshops".

Occupying forgotten spaces in the city

"Community bike workshops" are largely an urban phenomenon. They operate in premises snatched from abandonment, "borrowed" temporarily, set aside by tolerant municipal

authorities, or located in undesirable locations that property developers have not yet targeted for redevelopment. The only requirement is lockability, some storage of tools and bikes, and hopefully electricity. Their "staff" are largely volunteers, activists and community-minded cyclists, sometimes getting limited support from local municipal authorities, donors, or non-profit organisations. They are "edgy" and relatively unregulated members of community economies.

Workshops numbers have grown since the 1990s, and are widespread across Europe and the Americas[1], with many examples elsewhere. The largest concentration is in France, with over 350 of different types. Most of those are networked through "l'Heureux Cyclage"[2], which coordinates events, logistics, and learning between workshops, and they assist well over 100,000 people yearly (Batterbury et al 2023). WUK in Vienna, established in 1983, may be the world's oldest CBW.

Players in the community economy

In workshops, the human infrastructure of cycling develops and is nurtured. People can come in and fix their own bikes and learn these practical skills by doing so. In other types of workshops, donated bikes repaired by the volunteers themselves are offered freely or cheaply to people who need them, as a community service. Donated or scavenged bikes are re-used creatively and cheaply, avoiding too much new consumption. While the work can be fun, the major goal is extending the useful life of bicycles and components using second-hand and some new components, and they are part of the community economy, as we will explain (Cameron & Isaac, 2022).

Workshops are important in pushing greater demand for transitions to lower emissions and healthier mobility options, or at least demonstrating those options to those wedded to the car. They are "Foregrounding the importance of care, maintenance, and repair" and this is "a step in challenging teleological progressive shiny ideals of innovation" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 210).

FInancial turnover is usually modest in community economies. Members who attend workshops usually pay for their own repairs. Worldwide, our surveys have found the majority of workshops operate with an unpaid part-time workforce, although in some countries like France, government employment schemes financially support some paid employees who are learning a new trade. In most cases, therefore, volunteers want to participate, as part of "mutual aid" and learning a new skill, finding convivial ways of working together and resolving technical repair problems in a supportive way (Batterbury et al, 2023).

Helping people in need

By supporting the community through bike workshops, city managers can harvest community energies, support low-carbon travel, and build goodwill. Workshops are generally a collective space where people from all backgrounds, ages, and skills can come together to learn and enjoy the art of bike repair: combining a personal sense of achievement with shared activities and values (Batterbury and Dant, 2019).
In order to build a strong foundation for a workshop, a strong mentality of togetherness, inclusivity, and belonging is needed, directed by rules of good behaviour and respect for others. The significance of community led initiatives means that friends and family alike join together to make a difference for each other and others, cutting across politics, gender, class, and culture. There is little need for competition between bike fixers. The simple tools and activities encourage conviviality (Illich, 1973). The goals of individual workshops vary, but all of them try to see more bikes working and on the streets. According to Achievement Goal Theory, achievement goals are future-oriented and are viewed as "cognitive representations

The Mount Roskill Bike Kitchen , New Zealand
Source: ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

of desired outcomes … direct behavior in specific ways that differ through how competence is conceptualized by the individual" (Chazan, 2022). Giving opportunities for good practice and experience to learn a new set of skills, keeping bikes on the road, allows for communities to grow stronger and work better together, simultaneously doing something good for humanity.

Our own volunteering has been at WeCycle in Melbourne, Australia (Batterbury et al, 2023). Melbourne is a fairly flat city of almost 5 million people, Despite having decent public transport, bikes are handy for shorter trips, commuting for work, and for filling in gaps in the public transport network. This small social enterprise fixes and delivers bikes for people in need. It has operated since 2017 in an inner suburb. The majority of bike recipients are referred to us by social care agencies who pass on requests for bikes from families and individuals. Our prime clients are fleeing conflicts in the Middle East, and arrive with very few possessions or support networks. Bikes are helpful to them, for fitness or commuting to schools and jobs. We believe that the bikes we give are being used.

We operate from a small building owned by the local municipal council, and it is a convivial if slightly chaotic space where disassembled parts, tools, and bikes in progress are stored. The budget is small; major costs are insurance and parts that cannot be recycled, like brake pads, grips, chains and cables. We can sometimes have some costs covered by community grants, or by selling a few unwanted bikes at modest prices. All labour is carried out by a diverse group of 4-9 volunteers working once or twice a week. The work is largely "convivial" (Illich, 1973): we use simple tools, learn from each other, and try to remain supportive and helpful without

too many rules and regulations. WeCycle delivers more than 180 bikes a year to refugees or asylum seekers across the city. Other Melbourne workshops do similar work, making the combined efforts a substantial contribution to welfare and sustainable transport needs. Connecting recipients with their bikes sometimes involves a car, given Melbourne's large size, and communicating with newly arrived migrants who speak little English can difficult... Once a month, WeCycle volunteers also check and sometimes fix bikes for local residents as part of a scheme for the public, with Council support.

Conclusion

In a bicycle-friendly city, it is common consensus that installing cycle lanes, bike parking and safety measures are the task of urban planners, requiring money and government approvals. In some car-dominated cities, this task has hardly begun. But self-repair of bikes with Illich's ''convivial tools" (1973), and riding, fall outside the control of planners and governments, and are embedded in communities. In affluent cities, workshops help to decarbonise transport, and reconnect riders with their machines. For poorer households, they perform an essential task, allowing cheaper options for keeping bikes on the roads, recycling second-hand parts and minimising financial outlay. In all cases, community bike workshops challenge the convention and the frustrations of urban automobility. ■

1. Such as "Bike!Bike!?" http://en.bikebike.org
2. For more information, visit this link: https://www.heureux-cyclage.org/?lang=en.

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Spatial Strategies and Metropolitan Peripheries: the Extension of Cycling Networks in Mexico City and Toronto

Developing a comparative and geographical analysis of cycling network expansion in Mexico City and Toronto, this article suggests that attention to socio-spatial differences within urban areas is critical to understanding the successes and failures of cycling policies.

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Introduction

Successful and expanding bike share systems. Ambitious climate and road safety targets. Reallocation of road space. "Temporary" pandemic bike lanes on prominent corridors, later made permanent without much controversy. The trajectories of Mexico City and Toronto's cycling infrastructure developments show many parallels. Unlikely candidates to "cycling city" status, these major North American metropolises are accelerating policies and programs to provide safe riding conditions and encourage modal shift.

Nonetheless, their successes and failures -sometimes in common, in other cases very distinct- highlight many of the challenges cities face in expanding and improving cycling infrastructure and promoting cycling. Despite sustained efforts, cycling rates remain relatively low in both cities, and infrastructural change has largely been limited to central zones and specific corridors.

In this short article, I present some observations on the shifting and contested geographies of cycling infrastructure provision in Mexico City and Toronto, based on fieldwork for a comparative PhD research project. In doing so, I hope to contribute to understanding of the relations between cycling infrastructures and diverse urban contexts and how these shape and constrain the improvement of conditions for cycling.

Urban difference and spatial strategies

How can one compare the cycling infrastructures and policies of Mexico City and Toronto? Kilometres of bike lanes are a hopelessly reductive measuring stick, abstracting away their characteristics, location, and impacts. Some of the areas with the most cycling in Mexico City lack official infrastructure altogether. Moreover, any comparison circumscribed by city boundaries is complicated by the fact that both cities sit at the core of sprawling metropolitan areas with very heterogeneous urban contexts for cycling. Instead, I propose to compare not only between cities, but also within, highlighting geographical differences in cycling conditions and the strategies of infrastructural reconfiguration that the cities are deploying to tackle them.

Contrasting the configuration of cycling infrastructure in the metropolitan core and periphery highlights how cycling planners deploy "spatial strategies" that differentiate between territories. In both cities, cycling infrastructures have long been spatially circumscribed. Bike share and bike lanes have been concentrated in central areas, which coincide in featuring the highest number of short journeys that can easily be done by bike. In Toronto, a long history of ambitious plans for city-wide networks has been limited by political contestation marked by an urban/suburban divide (Walks, 2015). By contrast, in Mexico City, cycling policy is much more recent, only truly taking off in 2010 with the launch of the bike-share system Ecobici. Until recently, all on-road cycling infrastructure was co-located with Ecobici in the central zone- a political choice aimed at positioning cycling as part of "an aspirational, green and civic-minded lifestyle" for the middle classes, rather than a vehicle of the poor (Sosa López, 2021: 477).

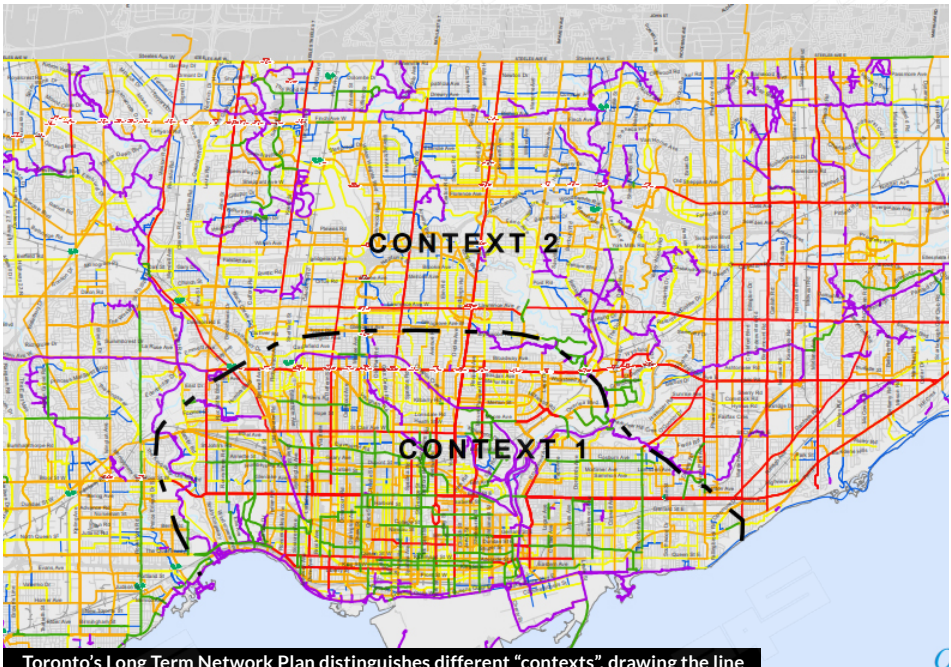
The superficial similarity of the spatial distribution of cycling infrastructures in Mexico City and Toronto masks more fundamental differences, however. Beyond the downtown business districts, their urban form could hardly be more distinct. While Toronto's neatly ordered postwar "suburbs" attracted the automobile-owning middle classes, the explosive growth of Mexico City's sprawling "periferia" has been driven by low-income migrants constructing their own housing. Concurrently, rates and practices of cycling diverge significantly. In the flat parts of the periferia, the bicycle is the vehicle of choice for many, often out of economic necessity-paradoxically, Mexico City's bicycle policy situated cycling infrastructures where cycling rates were relatively low. By contrast, Toronto's suburbs are highly car-dependent and the little cycling that takes place is largely recreational. Many consider cycling for transport a hobby of the downtown elite, which explains why repeated attempts to expand infrastructure beyond inner wards have generated fierce political resistance.

Notwithstanding these differences, both cities are seeking to address the poor conditions for cycling on their peripheries. Toronto is steadily progressing towards a city-wide network, extending significant city-wide corridors out from downtown and, further out in the suburbs, complementing its considerable and expanding network of multi-use trails with strategically placed on-street facilities. It is difficult to pinpoint a critical juncture, as sociocultural and political change in the inner suburbs has increasingly enabled a capable and well-funded institutional apparatus to leverage transit expansion and road resurfacing to extend cycling facilities. Mexico City presents a clearer case of policy change, with the entry of a left-wing government in 2018 marking a commitment to deliver infrastructure to underprivileged areas. Rather than expand

its cycling network contiguously, Mexico City's new spatial strategy has involved implementing isolated networks connected to improved and secure bicycle parking facilities at public transport stations-rather than the central cycling network, which can be over 20 kilometers of complex and dangerous roadways away.

Learning from Mexico City

Despite the seemingly insoluble differences in terms of mobility patterns, urban form, climate, and culture, Toronto and Mexico City face similar challenges in terms of scale. In both cities, cycling is not a feasible mode for most cross-city trips due to danger and distance. Mexico City's "peripheral network" strategy, so far implemented in the southeastern municipality of Tláhuac (SEMOVI, 2019), recognizes this fact. Stimulating cycling in the "suburbs" means facilitating local journeys, while trips to downtown or elsewhere in the city must be intermodal. Curiously, despite its significant transit expansion and a multimodal mode shift target,



Toronto's Long Term Network Plan distinguishes different "contexts", drawing the line between the line between "Old Toronto" and the post-war suburbs. Source: city of Toronto (n.d)

Toronto is not investing in secure bicycle parking at transit stations, and the regional transit agency Metrolinx (which primarily serves suburban commuters) has been hamstrung by pro-sprawl provincial politicians who have removed its remit to manage station access.

More broadly, Mexico City has leaped at opportunities to combine transit and cycling improvements. Some of the longest cycling corridors in the city are shared bus/bike facilities, formalizing usage patterns that were already taking place. In Toronto, many reject these configurations as unsafe, and roll-out of bus priority lanes has been limited, despite ample road space. On the other hand, Mexico City largely avoids the mixing of pedestrians and cyclists that is common in Toronto- whether it takes place legally on recreational trails, or as the illegal and dangerous "sidewalk cycling" that many prefer to battling traffic on high-speed arterials.

Thus, while Mexico City could be said to follow a "maintenance-based approach" (Bruno & Nikolaeva, 2020) that recognizes and facilitates the cycling practices already taking place in different territories, Toronto seems

A trolleybus-bike corridor in Mexico City

committed to rolling out a homogeneous network of protected lanes in the hope they will engender the same effects in the suburbs as in the centre. This may fail to please both types of cyclists that currently circulate in the suburbs: the few strong and assertive "vehicular cyclists" favor the width and visibility of roadways, while the safety-conscious "sidewalk cyclists" may prefer multi-use trails (which are basically wider and smoother sidewalks). Moreover, protected bike lanes may generate more trenchant opposition than sidewalk improvements or bus priority. On suburban arterials with relatively low cycling demand, combining bus/bike lanes with sidewalk-level multi-use trails could prove a more inclusive and less controversial solution than segregated bike lanes.

Of course, while interventions on Mexico City's peripheries work to protect and foster an existing cycling ecosystem and its social infrastructure of workshops and community organizers, Toronto faces the uphill challenge of creating a culture of everyday cycling from a very low base. Beyond material infrastructures, this means strengthening social and human supports for cycling in the suburbs (Snajie, 2021)- a considerable task now being undertaken by "cycle hubs" throughout the city (Ledsham & Verlinden, 2019).

Could Mexico City learn from Toronto? At first sight, there are few positive lessons– and much to learn about what to avoid. While many Mexicans may desire the standard of living of suburban Canadians, the inflexible urban form and entrenched automobility of Toronto's outer neighbourhoods illustrates the social and ecological dangers of standardization and ordering in the name of private speed and wealth. In terms of governance, Toronto's cumbersome system whereby all infrastructure projects must be approved not once, but twice, by city council, and can effectively be vetoed by the

local councillor, is a case study of dithering and delay in the name of democratic oversight. However, Toronto's institutional apparatus for advancing cycling projects is considerable, and not subject to complete overhaul when a new mayor is elected. Even under rabidly anti-bike mayors like Rob Ford, the high-profile removal of a few highly controversial lanes was easily compensated by improvements elsewhere, undisputed due to local councillor support. By contrast, the continuity of policies and projects in Mexico City is subject to the whims of incoming mayors, raising the stakes of each election cycle and turning the management of the city into a showcase of political ambitions-often to the national presidency.

This comparison of Mexico City and Toronto reveals that the apparent parallels between their cycling policies diverge drastically due to their internal heterogeneity, rather than the general attributes of either city. Studies of the global proliferation of cycling promotion through infrastructural reconfiguration must pay closer attention to differences within, as well as between urban areas, and the technical and political strategies deployed to work across heterogeneity. While there can be no general model of cycling infrastructure for the North American metropolis, a geographically situated approach can take us a long way to understanding their differential trajectories. ■

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Walk Towards Future: Integrating the World

As part of the Lifeline initiative, cities are made to be livelier and better for all residents. The essay aims to improve the quality of life for residents, make cities more efficient, and create a more sustainable environment.

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▸ Almost all cities and countries have an automobile-focused transportation infrastructure, and more than half the population uses cars only for local transportation. Walking and cycling are great ways to build a sustainable future amid pollution and health problems. It gives us time to admire the architecture, to watch the river, to discover hidden bits of green as you walk through the city. It is possible to walk the pavements at whatever pace desired without the impediment of other people and without breathing in the choking pollution of rush hour traffic.

With the start of Lifeline (राह), we aim to bring the world together through walks absorbing the nature around, celebrating festivals and bring out humanity through walks. We want to inspire people to come together, explore each other's cultures and appreciate the beauty of nature. Also, we conduct radio chats, TV shows, and workshops to raise

awareness of cycling and walking among young people. Further to it, we believe that walking is an effective way to bring people closer and create meaningful connections. To achieve this, we must strive to increase understanding and respect for the diversity of cultures and views as well as encourage cycling infrastructure around us. Not only this but walking and cycling can help reduce carbon emissions and air pollution as well. Overall, these efforts can collectively help create a healthier and more sustainable environment for all.

It's no wonder that cities around the world are investing in bike-friendly infrastructure to encourage more people to get on two wheels. As we strive to unite the world and promote values, we must engage the streets so that they become safer and the crime rate eliminates in all respects. We must also focus on restoring the spirit of community in our neighborhoods and creating a safe and healthy environment while also working to eradicate social inequality and ensure that everyone has

Inclusive Development: A Global Vision

A Walking Campaign within Delhi, India

access to the same resources. Additionally, we should strive to foster a sense of connection and support among each other.

As a global vision, this initiative aims to make cities livelier and better for each individual. It strives to improve the quality of life for residents, make cities more efficient, and create a more sustainable environment. This could be done by investing in infrastructure, walking and bicycle lanes, and green spaces. Hence, the cities can ensure that their citizens have access to clean, safe, and healthy environments that foster well-being and economic growth. It also works to strengthen the sense of community and provide economic opportunities. Moreover, it is our belief that each and every city has a structure similar to that of a human body and deserves to breathe. A growing number of paved off-streets will be able to provide a low stress and safe cycling environment. This will encourage more people to cycle, leading to less traffic on the roads and lower emissions. Cycling also has health benefits, such as improved cardiovascular fitness and increased muscle strength.

it is our belief that each and every city has a structure similar to that of a human body and deserves to breathe

Despite cars and trucks are fighting to be the next big thing, cycling continues to be the most efficient, practical, and reliable way for urbanites to get around. Our goal is to improve cycling advocacy with bike infrastructure in a community, such as bike lanes, parking, and public transportation access. This will increase safety and accessibility for cyclists, and encourage more people to choose cycling as their preferred form of transportation. It will also help reduce traffic and

air pollution, making the community healthier and more sustainable. Additionally, cities with higher bicycling rates tend to have better road safety records as well, in addition to the environmental benefits. Having more cyclists on the roads also helps to reduce traffic congestion, making it easier for other motorists to get to their destinations and reducing air pollution.

Not only this but we envision streets where celebrations are happening, people are enjoying themselves, and greenery is all around. With a firm belief to invest in our communities and prioritize the needs of the people, we must work together to create a better future for all, where everyone can thrive. Together, we can create a world we want to live in. We can bridge the gaps between cultures, share our knowledge, and build a better tomorrow. We must have faith that, together, we can make a difference and create a better world. Pedestrians will not only slow down cars, but will also reduce their space on roadways, reducing many five-lane arterials to three lanes for cars, allowing protected bicycle lanes on both sides of the streets. It would also encourage more people to use alternative forms of transportation, such as biking or walking, which is better for everyone. Also, it would reduce noise pollution, leading to a quieter and more peaceful environment.

Together, we envisage a greener future with slow-streets which will be expanded into slow-neighborhood zones instead of individual streets. This will create a safe and connected environment for everyone, and will allow for better access to parks, stores, and other public facilities while also encouraging people to get out of their homes and become more active, leading to a healthier lifestyle. In our effort, we aim to make cycling an everyday mode of transportation. Streets must be designed so that they are the most efficient part of any city by planners and designers. We need to accept this change and work towards future. By investing in cycle infrastructure, we can create more livable and healthy cities. As Albert Einstein once said: *"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving."*

Can and if Pedals Change the Future? Wheel versus Engine–Oriented Development

Modern civilization is predominantly motor-based, leading to detrimental effects such as pollution and traffic. Can we bring about a change or make an impression on this paradigm by adopting biking or alternative patterns?

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▶ Is it possible to imagine the development of an ecosystem based on wheels /bike and not engines? Is it possible to imagine changing the direction of "motorized development" and "car/vehicle-oriented" today by changing the direction of civilization from the two elements of "acceleration and motor" to "walking and cycling"? And the second, can the design and formation of the ecosystem, life patterns, architecture and civilization be reduced/released from the extensive focus on the polluting engine and motors?

In addition to the forms of food gathering and hunting, animal husbandry, agriculture and industry to services, the transition and transformation of human civilization has been accompanied by technological and social **revolutions.** The **industrial revolution** with steam power and feul combustion (internal combustion engines) and then the **information revolution** with the Internet. These fundamental developments changed our way of life, that is, our attitude and movement.In other words their formulation, two outstanding and "disruptive and discontinuous" forms of dimming and emergence of these

revolutions have been a method that has changed the **paradigm of movement and displacement** to physical and virtual acceleration and speed. This revolutionary transformation has also taken place with a different kind of use and transformation in the exploitation of human physical power and the change of exploitation of animals and water to "sucking and swallowing the life force" of the biosphere.

In the first centuries, all human affairs and movements were done with his own hands and feet and physical strength, gradually extraction and exploiting other humans as slaves and animals as power and food became new part of human era. The source and driving force of the biological and civilizational movement of human beings gradually shifted from **human muscles,** hands and feet to cattle and related technological devices (the invention of the wheel, lever, cart, carriage, etc). With the **industrial revolution** and the discovery of steam and oil and the hidden and intra-material forces, direction of taking and exploitng these forces displaced and inverted, simultaneously with intellectual and social development, to other aspects of nature. The wheel, which in the dominant **paradigm of muscle power,** was a means of transferring and converting power, jumped from the ground into mechanical and rotating machines and vehicles and found a revolutionary role from **soil to tank.** The paradigm of exploiting hidden forces in matters became a current routine and a new formation. Little by little, human realizes that the vital forces of the earth are much more than the domesticated forces in the muscles and the gravity that governs them, and that all the particles of the world and the earth have vital force or energy for consumption!

The exploitation of animals gradually gave way to the exploitation of fossil fuel,material and mineral energy resources and the overall colonization of the earth's atmosphere. The wheel, which was invented and expanded along with the limbs of humans and animals for the operation and cooperation of muscles and in the previous paradigm, with a leap in

function, it no longer found a partner for the development and formation of the **wheel-oriented transformational formation** and became a gear and a fundamental tool in the machine and engine paradigm. The huge rotating and mobile era of industrial revolution and colonization of nature and land were cominge to stage. Carts and levers lost the rhyme to emerging cars and machines (engines), and the bicycle became a singular and elegant survivor and a legacy of innovation in tradition and an isolated and individual element of the age of muscle energy. Mobility gave way to the core and foundation and new axis of civilization, namely **acceleration and speed.** The bicycle, which had just become proud with the industrial revolution and was considered a human innovation and a companion and link with mankind, became subject and subordinate to the power and speed of cars and engines, and found a personal, recreational and sports aspect and role at the edge of the mobility of civilization, and was removed from the scene of daily life, work and leisure. It was reduced and limited to small groups and finally to the **sports industry** (not all of life scene same as cars).

Cycling Activism. Photographer: Sadra Vojdani

On the other hand, if a paradigm centered on muscle power (with cities, alleys and houses, garden alleys, castles and squares, and inner and outer palaces, oriented mainly on thin, curved and short, with a maximum of 2 segments,and the companionship of humans and domesticated animals was related to it) in another paradigm based on the capitalistic and economic exploitation -not the vital needs- of the hidden and material forces of the earth, *the ecosystems are forms with rules and principles that are mathematicalized and collage-like(with the vertical expansion and mass and uniformity, the emergence of streets, highways, parking lots and the birth of linear, checkered and geometric forms,not curved and slim based on human needs and wants).* It was not the axis, and the only elements such as ideology, politics, power, capital, science and knowledge also played a role in shaping them(modern cities), but their basis and hidden institution is still mythological and rooted in the fears and hopes of humanity (Fakouhi, 1396:138-149).

Therefore, one of the modern myths that make up cities can be considered the same unknown, routine and imperceptible and pleasure-oriented **myth of cars and machines,** which actually, according to Urry (1400) have the greatest role in the life and construction of our society with the emergence of the **mobility paradigm** in the current era. And along with other mobiles, transactions and distributions today, they are the builders of the current mobile society and dynamic rotation, and have turned energy itself into an important issue (Urry, 2012, 2014). Therefore, wide and huge cars were turned for humans,same as a women, fathers and mothers (Avatar= iron lord) accompanied him everywhere, but not same as his child and companion and tamed) and accordingly formed a new economic and social system for him, from the supply and distribution chain of cars, fuel and parts and their sales to the separation of the sidewalk from Savarero, the **car-oriented**

cities and the **new consumer world** with traffic, energy crisis, climate change, shortage and erosion of water and soil resources, green space and the deterioration of the proper environment, etc.

were new era and development of civilization and communities that presented to him Couldn't take another form, different from this black image, accelerating and consuming and sucking the life sap and energy of the planet, and the machine and engine (in terms of fossil, polluting and consuming)? Is it possble for another form that give a proper share to the human being and his muscle strength, *so that the surplus is not wasted in the health industry, the fight against obesity and all kinds of diseases, the sports industry and the gym, etc.* The first day of creation and heaven before the expulsion of Adum and uniformity of nature and human?

However, the solutions are not solid and hard in hindsight and sometimes the regression of returning to the past, and the solutions are created in future and with innovation, But for innovation, human beings must refer to the past (because the future is neither seen nor can be seen, it is only created and constantly transformed into the present, the future is a present fantasy and an ideal). Therefore, change in the current paradigm of exploitation and colonization of inanimate objects, plants, and animals, and in a word, the ecosystem and the earth, is not possible except by looking at the past, the sufferings, and the successes. Due to the combination of human and muscle power, the bicycle was along the previous paradigm and could create a new social, economic and technological system (Geels 2004, 2011) and create less disasters in connection with non-consumptive and equal prosperity, as well as ecology and architecture, and create a different and better reputation.

Perhaps in the future, this capacity can be used for innovation and to create and solve situations against the positive strains of fluidity and modern mobility (Internet, non-consumerist and productive neighborhoods, etc). Although this vision is a **utopian fantasy,** the effective and experimental return of the bicycle to the new civilization and modern life can be experienced at least in areas ready for urban change or test/pilot samples starting from zero and previous design. Although it

is not possible to bring back the wheel and bicycle in the life and paradigm of acceleration, energy and consumption and "a consumerist society, a civilization of excess and waste" (Eco, 120: 1400), but the surviving capacity of the wheel and bicycle have been discarded and neglected.The capacity in creating an alternative and different economic social system, both on a case-by-case and experimental basis, and in intra-urban and peri-urban movements and commuting. The ecosystem of this attitude can be tested either by introducing the bicycle and "its related networks" in the change of lifestyle and urban design/ redesign in some of the current parts of the city and countryside that are ready to be accepted, or basically are fitest by previous design in new areas.

In the scenario of the existing situation/current cities, policymaking and cultural creation are usually followed around the new concept of **cycling citizen** and **car-free cities,** and the change of the city from **car-oriented to pedestrian and two-wheeled types,** and more importantly, virtual and electronic capacities. Clusters of non-motorized commuting are considered (Aldred, 2010; Aldred, 2018; Bruntlett, 2018); but in the second scenario (future city), which is designed and built from scratch, the design and construction of **green, smart,cycle-based and non-motorized settlements/ areas,** can give us a full experience of a different ecosystem from the current civilization with a more open hand and present and show all its merits and consequences.

With an idealistic approach, in the architecture of these wheel-oriented towns, cars and fossil pollution can be completely removed from residential areas, at the beginning, streets and alleys should be designed in such a way that, following the principle of infrastructure contiguity, it requires walking or Bicycles and not cars, and even electric motors should be equipped with electric stairs and elevators only to move essential elements (children, elderly, patients, and

The annual event of participation of cyclists, Tehran

Photographer: Mohammad Nazarpoor

moving emergency cases). Car parking should also be designed outside the town or underground (the car should be banished outside the city and **the Agora will return to the context of life)** and doing some things requires not buttons and electric motors but pedals and turning, walking, running, pulling and force. The muscle of one or more people and even in the form of games and entertainment can be used to convert and store muscle energy for other tasks and even store energy for other resources, especially night lamps of habitats. **Smart, green, water-oriented towns** and with minimum energy consumption and maximum and empathetic participation of man with the environment (Fakouhi, 1401), not with the pattern and result of his exploitative domination in exploitation and consumption.

In addition, today the two concepts of **"15-minute cities"** and **"complete neighborhoods"** are new concepts in urban design strategy. Two important things are the **accessibility** (safe and convenient) to daily goods and services and the **ability to walk and bike.** So that people can have a complete and all-round neighborhood and a place for the basic needs of life and work in a quarter of an hour. As a result, they don't need to use a car for work, and if needed, this work can be done with a bicycle; Because a study in the bike-oriented city of Cambridge has also evaluated the distance of commuting to work and the free parking as the biggest challenges (Case et al, 2013).

What remains is human's eternal desire for benefit and prosperity, and the other is the worthless minorities surrounded by greedy majorities! Man is by nature a seeker of comfort and well-being and looking for a shortcut. Therefore, relaxation is one of his desires and surrendering to hardship and bitterness and using muscles and pedaling in uphill and hardships is difficult and irreversible for him. Comfort and benefit without effort and wealth and prosperity without suffering and hardwork has been the source of corruption and deception, and if our moral and value view accepts and commits

to this point, the evils of comfort will be reduced, and the minorities with empty hands will never be empty from the earth, and the change factors/game changers,agents and the activists will be the correct subjects of changes and movements, even if these changes are not fast and revolutionary. But patrimony of motorized civilization with traffic, pollution and the death of the environment is a warning bell, to **claim everyone's right to their own share.** *Mankind should be entitled to his share and just like other parts of the planet's work and sustainable effort and consume it justly.* Maybe changing the lifestyle in selected urban areas (having the infrastructure and culture of using bicycles and becoming a model and spreading to other areas) with correct urban and social politics (development of fluidity and virtual mobility and electronic government and services, etc.) In addition to the fundamental work of building tissues and bodies that are centered on pedals and wheels and that are friendly to the body, mind, spirit, and joy (human-centered instead of iron and fuel-centered) and free from stagnation and motor pollution (and full of the noise, shouts, and uproar of human happiness in the street and The places full of meeting, communication, understanding and conversation, and in a word, the return of the modern Agora) can bring a messianic touch to this corrupt and soulless world. A movement and development based on "walk and bike- centered patterns". ■

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Return of the Child–Friendly City? How Social Movements are Changing European Urban Areas

Urban development and social norms concerning childhood have led European cities to a situation where streets are no longer places for children and young people. The essay describes current social movement activities that counter this trend by mobilising local communities with innovative initiatives.

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▶ Urban development and social norms concerning childhood have led European cities to a situation where streets are no longer places for children and young people. Gill Valentine has explained that this shift has been fuelled by our division of children into two categories- “angels” and “demons”.

She described how on one hand children are considered too small, vulnerable and innocent to roam and play in urban spaces because of traffic, “stranger-danger” and other hazards. On the other hand, teenagers are constructed as a public threat and should not be allowed to hang out on the streets with their bikes, skateboards and presumably bad intentions. Subsequent studies have continued to explain how these kinds of representations have caused children’s exclusion and

Barcelona, in May 2022

Photographer: Calvox Periche/Kidical Mass

"othering" from public spaces in the complex web of urban governance, public life and parenting. Children's autonomous movement and play in cities has steadily declined in recent decades. In turn, children and young people are increasingly sequestered in homes, cars or institutional spaces for adult-controlled education and play.

Many experts and interest groups have voiced their concerns about this and explained why closing the streets to children is bad policy. Children's physical activity levels are alarmingly low and limiting their sense of safety and autonomy also hampers their mental and social wellbeing. These trends are endangering the health of an entire generation and compromising their ability to uphold societies and economies with grim dependency ratios.

At the same time, as often noted by childhood scholars, children should not be reduced to mere "future investments" or "adults of tomorrow". They are also people with present-day rights to citizenship, participation and autonomy in their living environments.

Old and new movements for the child-friendly city

However, there are many examples of how people have resisted children's exclusion from the streets in modern history. One of the most notable ones was the Stop de Kindermoord (Stop child murder) movement in the Netherlands in early 1970s. This aimed to curb child traffic fatalities, which, at the time, had peaked to the highest in Europe.

The movement organised demonstrations, pressured decision makers to pass legal and planning measures and created safe spaces through direct action and tactical urbanism. With success. Child safety rose up the agenda, and the campaigners continued to play an important role in traffic policies for over a decade. However, over time they were

marginalised and traffic danger was largely re-established as a "natural" part of urban childhood.

Half a century after the Stop de Kindermoord movement, we are witnessing another wave of civic activity sweeping across the globe but especially in Europe. Old and new strategies are deployed, but the message is similar: the campaigners want systemic change, not awareness campaigns on road safety.

Promoting safety vests, helmets and children's traffic awareness are not strategies to curb traffic violence but to maintain it, as they offload the responsibility on individual children and parents. Instead the activists mobilise entire communities and use local demonstrations and experiments to provide people with concrete experiences of how cities could be different.

Taking action nowadays

Kidical Mass is a rapidly growing urban protest of parents, educators and children that organises colourful bicycle demonstrations in small and large cities. In 2022 it gathered over 90,000 children, young people and families over two campaign weekends in over 400 locations across Europe.

The organisers attest that Kidical Mass is a one-day-experiment that allows people to see city spaces in a different light and turn these experiences into political demand. The movement's political effect recently became very concrete in Germany, where the Transport Minister's Conference supported a reform of the national road traffic law based on a petition handed in by Kidical Mass activists in 2022.

BiciBús (Bike Bus) is another growing movement. The goal is simple: to provide children with a guided group to cycle to school with a predefined route at a certain time. They usually run once a week, aiming to develop the habit of cycling for families and entire communities. Pedalling in groups is not only a way to safely arrive at school, but also fun, and a way to demonstrate for child-friendly cities. The idea is not new, but in the last couple of years the number of children's pedalling buses has grown rapidly, especially in Europe, thanks to social media.

School streets and play streets are also an important implication the new civic activity. Local advocacy groups (see for example Playing Out in the UK) are mobilising schools and local communities to create these open, inclusive, and safe urban spaces. Often the idea is to open certain stretches to children by limiting car traffic. In some places collaboration with decision makers and planners has led to concrete changes. The campaigners attest that in the long term school streets and play streets should be connected to one another to create comprehensive, safe and inclusive mobility networks.

Ways forward?

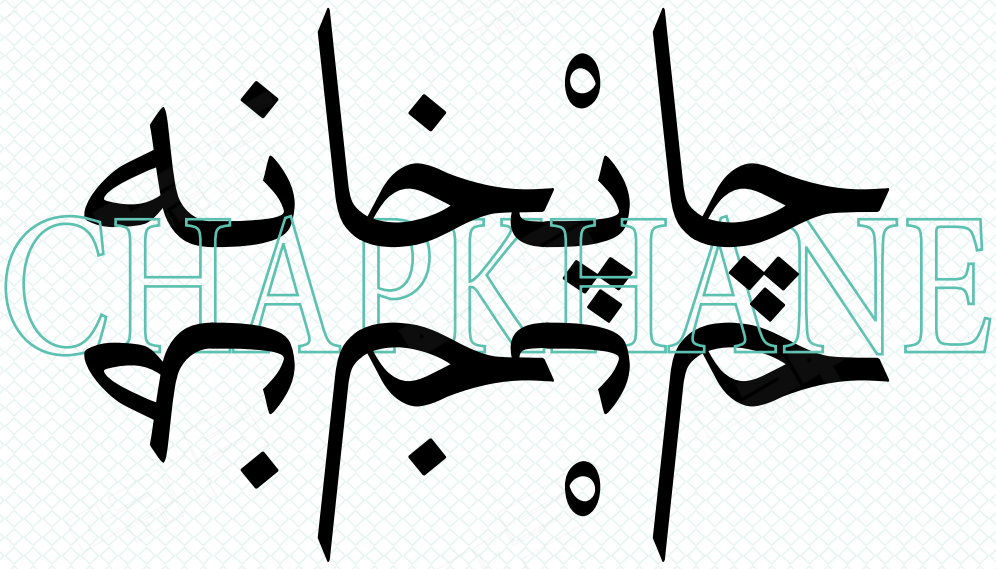
In many respects the current civic movements for child-friendly cities are continuing the work of their predecessors. By claiming urban spaces, introducing citizen-led experiments and mobilising vast amounts of people, they create opportunities to see and think of alternative futures. What they want and what is only starting to emerge is the direct impact on more institutional processes, initiatives and frameworks.

Still, in a relatively short time they have left a mark. While physical infrastructures might take time to change, the way communities use them can change much faster. Mounting concerns on children's wellbeing coupled with the need for an urgent sustainability transition of urban transport provide the movements with novel leverage. Whether we will witness a major paradigm shift or not, it seems like in some respects the activists have already won. On their local pedalling buses, demonstrations and pop-up streets they are not only demanding a better tomorrow, but are already living it[1]. ■

1. This essay was originally published by The Conversation and can be accessed here. Due to its innovative and valuable insights, we are republishing it in Kooche in collaboration with the authors.

BiciBús in Barcelona. Photographer: Calvox Periche/CityLab

Kidical Mass is organising the next large scale Action Weekend in May 5-7, where European cities can expect an even larger number of demonstrations, BiciBúses and street experiments than before.

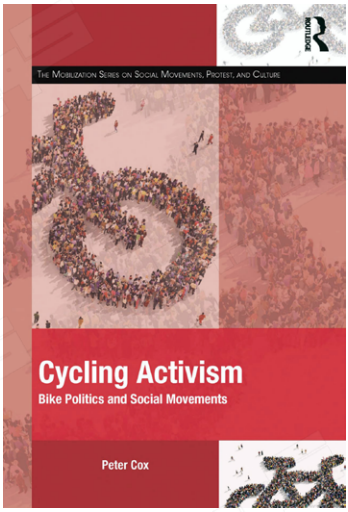


کتابی که خواندم، اما فراموش نکردم

A book that I read, but didn't forget

Cycling Activism: Bike Politics and Social Movements

Reviewer: Mohammad Nazarpoor



Author: Peter Cox
Publication: Routledge
First Published: 2023
Pages: 275

- What is it about?

> *Activism is often an expression of a way of being in the world. It involves an ontological (re)orientation. In other words, it is about (re)discovering new ways of being in the world. Activism is a journey, not a means to an end. Indeed, reaching a fixed end would suggest that the journey is over: no more change required. Achievement of any specific campaign goal may be counted as a victory, but it will not bring about a perfect world. Rather, every action and campaign is a means by which to steer the direction of change in a constantly shifting world (p. 16).*

How can we define cycling activism? What do bicycle activists want? Are there meaningful connections between critical cycling practices in different geographies? How can we look beyond local and individual campaigns and build a bigger picture to understand bicycle activism as a whole? If we want to do this, are the available models and lenses able to make this clear? What approach can we use to make a meaningful connection between cycling studies and social movement studies? What can each of these two fields add to the other? Cycling Activism is a full-length study of cycling activism that revolves around these kinds of questions.

Cycling Activism crosses disciplinary boundaries and seeks to look at

cycling practice and cycling activism through the lens of social movement theory. It can be seen as a bridge between academia and biography, with this belief that cycling is a powerful tool for both the interests of cyclists and the articulation of broader social concerns. The core idea is that cycling itself is not a political act, but is politicized through its linkage to other ideas, goals, and processes.

> *The right to ride and the practical possibilities of riding require political recognition and incorporating into political decision-making. Who is allowed to ride and where they can ride can be restricted by political fiat (p.xx)*

The book is included in *The Mobilization Series on Social Movements, Protest, and Culture* which publishes research in social movements, protest, and strategies of resistance. Peter Cox, the author, who a founder member of the Cycling and Society Research Group and a famous researcher on the sociology and the politics of sustainable transport and cycling. He is the author of Cycling: *A Sociology of Vélomobility and Moving People: Sustainable Transport Development, editor of Cycling Cultures and co-editor of The Politics of Cycling Infrastructure, Cycling and Society,* and *the Routledge Companion to Cycling.* He became involved in bike activism after university in the early 1990s and his academic studies allowed him to maintain engagement with activists.

> *With a university training in anthropology and ethnographic methods and having studied social movement and social activism at both undergraduate and doctoral level, I began looking more widely at cycle activism as a form of community engagement and social action in the early 2000s (p.43).*

The book is divided into two clear sections. The first section, as a theoretical foundation, focuses on *"social movement studies and the ways in which the study of bicycle activism challenges some commonplace assumptions about social action and social change" (p. 17).* The goal is to present a model for rethinking bicycle activism as an academic socio-political study. The primary concern is how we can create a foundational perspective for considering collective bicycle action and connect it to the body of knowledge in social movement studies.

Some important questions in this part may be: Is cycling a political act? What do cyclist activists want? Is activism merely a means to achieve certain goals, or is the process itself important? Can movements be reduced to campaigns? How is bicycle activism related to larger socio-political concerns? What is the relationship between cycling activism and social change? What is the contribution of the New Mobility Paradigm to the study of social movements and bicycle activism? The second part of the book analyzes some selected case studies linked to the theoretical discussion in order to understand how cycling practices and policies have developed. The main objective is to understand the connections and disconnections between them. The case studies are divided into two distinct groups:
Examples within the geographical framework of the UK and examples within a wider geographical framework from a global perspective. History and geography are the two main variables here.

> *Isolating geography as variable allows longitudinal comparison to examine how changes and development emerge or are forced over time. Isolating time as a variable allows us better to see how activism responds to differing contexts, social, political and economic (p. 122).*

The case studies focus on the historic politics of the UK, cycling practice and the challenge of public space, campaigns organized in specific relationship to existing government institutions, and peer-to-peer support actions that view everyday cycling as both an assertion of the right to mobility and a form of everyday resistance.

What approach does it take?

Using a Foucauldian approach, the book looks at bicycle activism from the perspective of social movement studies to present a theoretical foundation through which diverse cycling practices and approaches to change can be understood. The author believes that both fields can help each other to better understand and develop intellectually.

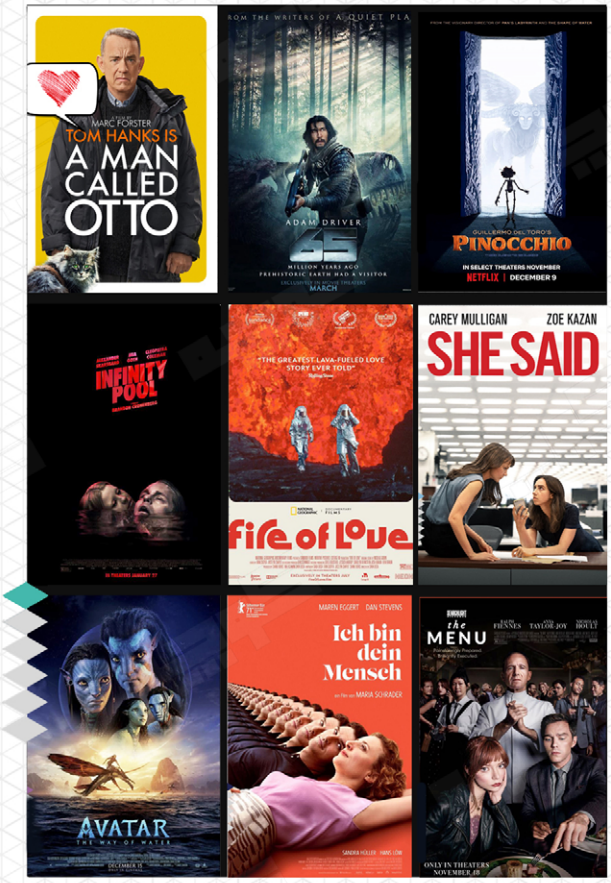
> *At heart, I want to argue not only that applying lessons for social movement studies allows us to understand bike activism better but also that studying cycle activism can expand how we think about social movements (p. 20).*

To explain the cases, the book focuses on book-length national historical studies, individual city studies, comparative studies, and micro-level studies of activism to paint a comprehensive picture of cycling practices in the section with social movement studies.

Who might be interested in this book?

The book will appeal to cycling activists, transport planners, sociologists, and anyone interested in social change and understanding bicycle activism through the lens of social movement theory.

Surce: forumviesmobiles.org



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