

# MAKING SPACE FOR CYCLING

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## **Introduction**

We often think of “cycling space” in cities as the physical infrastructures – bike lanes, parking facilities, bike boxes, etc. – that demarcate where it is appropriate, safe or desirable to ride a bike. Conceptualized this way, “making space for cycling” seems like a straight-forward process of building more bicycle infrastructure. Hence, the idea of “build it and they will come” (Cervero, Caldwell and Cuéllar, 2013) became a common expression in the last decade among progressive policy-makers in European and North American cities to justify the need to build bike lanes and increase cycling in their cities.

In this chapter we want to think of *other* kinds of spaces for urban cycling and broaden the horizon of how bicycle space is produced. Useful here is French philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s (1991 [1974]) conceptualisation of space as an interrelated triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space. Perceived spaces, or spatial practices, are the physical, material spaces of daily life and social interaction. Conceived spaces, or the representations of space, are the socially constructed discourses, signs, and meanings of space -- the “space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” (Lefebvre, 1991 p.38). Finally, lived space makes reference to space as experienced by people who use and occupy it, encompassing the previous two types of space. Lefebvre’s triad provides a framework to understand how space is produced and how social experiences are constituted in and through space, and offers an entry point for considering what space for cycling might mean. We also understand “cycling” as more than commuting, leisure cycling, or indeed more than *pedaling* a bicycle. Multiple kinds of cycling take place in cities, often unrecognized or invisibilized: cycling economies (Sarmiento-Casas, 2018), urban cycling races (Gamble, 2019), and community bike shops (Bradley, 2018) are also ways to make space for cycling. It follows that

making space for cycling need not be a top-down strategy, but can stem from citizen's initiatives and desires as they appropriate and produce cycling spaces, both enduring and temporary.

In addition to problematizing both "space" and "cycling", we want to move beyond Eurocentric interpretations of the relationship between cycling, society and space by grounding our discussion in the context of Latin America, where we both work. Over the past decade, a cycling boom has echoed in planning circles, drawing the attention of policy-makers, development NGOs, citizens, and scholars. However, while bicycle policies and programs from the Global South have started to travel not only South-South, but also South-North (Montero, 2018), cycling research and policy have largely drawn on the experiences of cities in Northern Europe. Against this, and building on scholarship primarily from and about Latin America, we heed the postcolonial call in urban studies to think about urban dynamics *from* the Global South (Roy and Robinson, 2016).

Building on these ideas, we delineate three spaces for urban cycling beyond physical infrastructure. First, we discuss temporary spaces as important spaces where new imaginations and practices of bicycling can emerge. Second, we turn to cycling policies as key spaces where urban cycling becomes institutionalized, that is, the spaces where decision-makers learn about bicycle policies whilst embedded in a multi-scalar field of power and politics. Finally, we discuss civil society and activist spaces to signal the ways in which grassroots and bottom-up initiatives can bring diverse and inclusive cycling spaces and politics into being. We specifically address prefigurative cycling spaces, cycling schools and community cycling, and feminist cycling spaces, though these are certainly not the only kinds of activist cycling spaces that exist.

### **Bicycle space: beyond infrastructure**

"Where do bicycles belong?" has been the subject of ample debate since the bicycle's appearance in the 19th century. In a recent article, for example, Michael Brown (2021) traces the history of cycling in South America where, owing to the multiple crashes on urban boulevards, cycling was confined to either velodromes in cities, or rural and suburban areas. More recently, a number of environmental and economic concerns have brought the bicycle into the spotlight of urban and transport planning

circles, once again raising the question of where do bikes belong, or *how to make space for cycling*. Accordingly, an agenda focused on “how to get more people to cycle” has derived in policy approaches encapsulated in the adage “build [infrastructure] and they will come”. Ralph Pucher and John Buehler’s extensive and influential research has repeatedly drawn attention to the vast infrastructural network that makes cycling in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands “irresistible” (Pucher and Buehler, 2008). And while the authors have been careful to clarify that infrastructure is not the *only* approach for encouraging cycling and making it safer, cycle paths have become the dominant imaginary of what a space for cycling is. In this way, urban cycling has become a “mobility fix”, intended to “[move] the highest number of people through a given space as fast as possible” (Spinney, 2020 p. 10) in line with demands for continuous growth and capital accumulation, often framed as “sustainable urbanism”.

The sustainability of such visions and approaches has been problematised over the past decade. Critical cycling research has scrutinised the uneven effects of cycling investments and emerging geographies (e.g. Golub et al., 2016; Stehlin 2019), demonstrating that “conflating the practice of bicycling with specific urban development projects designed to accommodate it, *limits* what can be seen as ‘bike friendly’ neighbourhoods and manufactures scarcity in what should be a public resource: urban streets” (Lugo & Hoffmann p. 45, emphasis added). This is not to say that cycling infrastructure should not be built, but that we should embrace a wider range of cycling mobilities and imaginaries to orient our efforts towards human flourishing, connection, and wellbeing (Spinney, 2020). Part of this reorientation entails moving away from a persistent focus on cycle paths and towards the social, cultural, and institutional scaffolding needed to support a substantial and lasting shift in the politics of mobility (Cresswell, 2010) that govern movement and the spaces where mobility is produced. In drawing on diverse experiences from Latin America, we broaden the horizon of what “space for cycling” is, and contribute to *worlding* cycling beyond the usual suspects (Montero, 2017a; 2017b; Castañeda 2021).

## **Temporary Spaces**

In recent years, terms such as pop-up, tactical, or DIY urbanism have become prominent in urban planning practice to name temporary urban interventions that are often low-cost, short-term and citizen-led. These kinds of projects have been promoted by urban designers, architects and “new urbanists” as a way to quickly and cheaply transform an urban space by giving people the experience of how urban space can be used differently (Lydon & García, 2015). This potential, however, has been met with skepticism by many critical urban scholars who see these projects as a rather cosmetic practice that does not challenge market-oriented urban development. Others have shown skepticism at the lack of engagement of tactical and DIY urbanism with the messy world of politics and organizing (Webb, 2018). Thinking from the perspective of Global South cities, Andres et al (2021) have highlighted how temporary urbanisms can be useful in places where formal planning is weak, but only when temporary urbanisms move from a place-shaping to a place-making approach.

Temporary bicycle programs have been at the center of this debate. Indeed, in the book *Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Actions, Long-Term Change*, Lydon and García (2015) used Bogotá’s Ciclovía as an example of tactical urbanism -- a temporary program that can be easily implemented because it does not require investment in bicycle infrastructure building. Yet, although these projects can have a powerful demonstrative potential to rethink how infrastructures can have uses other than those intended by planners, in this section we argue that seeing Ciclovía as tactical, pop-up or DIY-urbanism is a poor lens to understand the complex institutionalization efforts that have shaped Ciclovía over nearly five decades (Montero, 2017a). Rather, thinking these temporary programs as *experiments* in urban planning might be a better way to conceptualize not only their one-time demonstrative potential, but also the need to engage with institutions and politics to build the necessary alliances and networks to ensure the long-term impact of these programs (Sosa-López, 2021; Lugo, 2013). Making space for experimentation is therefore key to envision alternative mobile futures in cities.

The origins of Ciclovía can be traced back to an experiment organized in Bogotá on December 15, 1974 by Pro-Cicla, a bicycle organization led by 3 bike enthusiasts who wanted to do something about

the sprawl Bogotá was experiencing at the time. We keep here the language of “experiment” as that is the word one of Ciclovía’s founders used in a 1985 article reflecting on the origins of the program (Ortiz, 1985). Using their family and political connections, they were able to close to motorized traffic 80 blocks of the city’s two main arteries, Carrera 7 and Carrera 11. They called the event “the great pedal demonstration” and about five thousand people participated in it. Even though the program almost disappeared in the 1980s, the major institutional and budget changes done during the mid 1990s revived the program and expanded it significantly. Since 1995, different Bogotá mayors, planners and bicycle advocates have made important institutional changes to the program to improve and expand the length of Ciclovía (Montero, 2017a). As of 2018, Ciclovía’s total length was 97 kilometers, annual costs were about \$1.7 million USD dollars (75% coming from public funds), and attendance ranged from 600,000 and 1,400,000 users per event. By 2017, length has expanded to 113,7 kilometers (Sarmiento et al. 2017).

While pop-up, DIY or tactical urbanism emphasizes the mindset change potential of temporarily experiencing something different, the language of experimental urbanism allows us to not underestimate the institutional changes that are needed to transform cities in the long term. Inasmuch as space is lived and experienced by people in the course of everyday life, supporting and enabling a fulfilling urban environment will require a serious consideration of the multiple ways in which space is brought into being. Hence, we argue that physical cycling spaces (temporary or otherwise) ought to be coupled with an institutional framework favourable to cycling and other forms of non-motorised mobility.

### **Policy Spaces**

In the last two decades, the circulation of “sustainable urbanism” city models, policies or “best practices” has increased across the Global North and South. Among those, bicycle policies have become a favorite and it is worth thinking about policy space as a critical site in which space for cycling is made. Following Lefebvre, policy can be thought of as one dimension of conceived space, in which discourses, signs, and meanings of space are coded, and mobilities governed by technocrats.

How might we make space for cycling policy? Here, recent debates on policy mobilities can be helpful. This field seeks to critically examine the power-laden processes behind the movement of policies by, for instance, “studying through” the everyday sites and situations of policy-making to understand how and why certain policy ideas are mobilized and eventually adopted (McCann and Ward, 2012). These sites and situations include “conferences, seminars, workshops, guest lectures, fact-finding field trips, site visits, walking tours, informal dinners and trips to cafés and bars, among many others” (McCann and Ward, 2012: p. 47).

Interestingly, bicycle policy models today are not only coming from Amsterdam and Copenhagen. Cities of the South have also become policy models for other cities, both in the South and the North. In this context, Bogotá and its Ciclovía program, again, have often been the poster child (Montero, 2017a), replicated in cities as diverse as Jakarta, Mexico City, Cape Town, or San Francisco (Sarmiento et al. 2017). In the following paragraphs we take the case of Bogotá as a point of departure to discuss three particular policy spaces that contribute to making space for cycling through the construction and global circulation of transport policies: conferences, study tours, and digital media platforms.

The potential of conferences to result in policy change relies on their capacity to inspire and persuade influential local actors to form broader coalitions of actors (Cook & Ward 2012). Conferences are privileged places for the mobilization of emotional elements that are hard to convey in printed or online documents. In this context, conferences and forums, particularly those with some sort of world recognition, not only help build a sense of community among participants through providing spaces of face-to-face communication and experiential learning, they also give legitimacy when these advocates are back in their city. For instance, according to San Francisco transport advocate Cheryl Brinkman, the 2008 Towards Car-Free Cities conference in Portland gave Bogotá’s Ciclovía “a varnish of legitimacy” to implement it in San Francisco (Montero, 2015), and policy stories, images and videos brought back from the conference helped them push the Mayor to implement the Ciclovía-based program Sunday Streets in San Francisco in the mid 2000s (Montero, 2018).

A second key practice to circulate urban policies are study tours. These are short visits in which a delegation of people travels to another place to learn and experience something with potential to improve their organizations or places of origin (Montero, 2017b). However, study tours are not just learning instruments; tour participants are often selected because of their capacity to create and expand local coalitions that would push for particular policies back home. Also known as “policy tourism” (González 2011), study tours create “a sense of being ‘in tune’ with what is happening elsewhere” among tour participants (González 2011: p. 1412). In his study of how Bogotá’s transport policies were adopted in Guadalajara, Montero (2017b) showed that study tours were able to promote policy change in Guadalajara thanks to their capacity to: 1) educate the attention of influential local policy actors through hands-on “experiential learning;” 2) expand local coalitions through the building of trust and consensus around a policy model; and 3) mobilize public opinion through references to already existing policies.

Finally, due to the increased use of digital technologies in the last decades, the circulation of policy models and knowledge increasingly happens through a virtual infrastructure in the form of media platforms, blogs and social media sites where images and videos about particular policies are mobilized by advocates and other policy actors. Gunder (2011) has shown that the media can influence how urban space should be organized through its capacity to ‘engineer public beliefs’. In the context of bicycle policies, *Streetsblog*, an influential policy blog among US sustainable transportation and bicycle advocates has been particularly important. In particular, a video of Bogotá’s Ciclovía made by *Streetsblog*’s sister organization *Streetfilms*, became an important resource that contributed to the global circulation of the program that has helped persuade mayors to implement similar programs in many cities in the US and worldwide (Montero, 2018). Sustainable transportation advocates in different cities have used this video to explain the Ciclovía concept to their communities and to convince mayors and key urban decision makers of its potential value. As the digital and offline world are continuously in dialogue with each other, we should not underestimate digital spaces in their capacity to influence the process of making *physical* space for cycling.

## Activist Spaces

If we work with the premise that “cycling” is more than the physical practice of riding a bike, new imaginaries of space for cycling emerge. Fixing a bike, a mass ride, and teaching others how to cycle are some of the less obvious but thriving space-times where cycling is taking place in articulation with grassroots politics. These spaces for cycling move us to reconsider what the bicycle can do as a technology for transport *and social change*. The bicycle is being leveraged as a means to enable projects of community integration, social and mobility justice, claims to the right to the city, and feminist resistance. Hence, some spaces for cycling are also spaces for political education and “cycling while questioning” (Casas-Cortés et al., 2008). Our intention here is not to be exhaustive -- activist cycling spaces are as diverse as cycles and their users. Rather, we will focus on three paradigmatic examples: mass rides, community cycling initiatives, and feminist cycling spaces.

Mass cycle rides are a direct action tactic and a staple of bicycle activism everywhere (Carlsson, 2002). They are often referred to as “Critical Mass” rides owing to their most famous incarnation, San Francisco’s Critical Mass, which is as much a celebration of cycling as it is a performative critique of automobility. Nevertheless, a more global perspective alerts us to their almost simultaneous emergence in Mexico City and Santiago de Chile in the early 1990s. While the practice has been re-appropriated by different groups and in diverse contexts in articulation with their goals (e.g. charity rides), it follows the simple formula of gathering at a specific point in the city and then riding together, taking over streets and temporarily subverting automobilised space-time. Mass rides are often accompanied by practices such as the use of music to enliven city streets where the soundscape is typically dominated by the humdrum of motor traffic. Also common is the use of costumes, and the pursuit of exhilarating experiences derived from the playful use of urban infrastructures (Castañeda, 2020). What mass rides show is that space for cycling *might already exist* in the form of streets, avenues, and even highways, and in this way is closely connected to the car-free movement and its critiques of automobile-centred planning and the inequitable distribution of urban space. In other words, they draw attention to the ways in which perceived, conceived and lived space articulate to

give way to space for driving, but through practice and re-signification they can also become spaces for cycling (Furness, 2007).

Less visible but also significant are community cycling initiatives. This includes bicycle donation programmes, cycling schools, mechanics courses, and territorial interventions that anchor cycling practice within specific socio-spatial and socio-economic arrangements (Nixon & Schwanen, 2019). Here, “cycling” can be read as a constellation of practices related to the bicycle which need not include *riding* a bike, but nevertheless actualize the possibility of cycling. Leveraging these spaces is important inasmuch as they provide people with the knowledge, skills, and community support that are necessary to foster cultural shifts in people’s perceptions of what the bicycle is and what it can enable in terms of both transport and social inclusion. This is necessary for dismantling the culture of automobility, intervening the signs, meanings, and practices of mobility (i.e. the representations of space) associated with the modern capitalist paradigm that privileges speed, distance travelled, and individuality (Manderscheid, 2014). A “Kool” Routes to school programme in Chile, for example, showed that, in addition to teaching children how to cycle, community cycling has the potential to stimulate environmental values, gender equity, and re-value sustainable transport (Sagaris & Lanfranco, 2019). Cycling schools in general remain understudied, but they are ubiquitous in Latin America where they fulfill the crucial role of teaching adults (often adult women, see below) how to cycle. Like the “Kool” Routes program referred above, cycling schools are spaces for “learning and teaching of mobilities not so much as a process of disciplining as a collaborative and inventive practice that generates new ways of shaping movement” (Kullman, 2015; see also: Espíndola, 2018).

Relatedly, the cycling spaces created for and by women and gender-nonconforming people ought to be a necessary referent to make more inclusive cycling spaces that take into account the complex ways in which gender and mobility are co-constitutive, and the uneven outcomes of this process (Hanson, 2010). Feminist, women’s, and gender non-conforming people’s cycling spaces draw attention to the ways in which urban cycling spaces are masculinised environments in ongoing-formation that could become otherwise (Bonham et al, 2015). On average, in Latin American cities,

women represent only 25% of cycling trips (Díaz & Rojas, 2017). Issues of fear, the risks associated with automobile-centred transport planning, gendered perceptions of urban cycling, and absence of knowledge and skills necessary to cycle in cities contribute to this disparity (de la Paz Díaz Vásquez, 2017). To meet the challenge of gender parity in cycling and combat patriarchal values that circumscribe women's mobilities, feminist cyclists have developed *careful* space-times intended to create new associations between gender and mobility. For instance, mechanics workshops defy gender roles that associate bike mechanics with masculinity and foster women's autonomous mobility through the sharing of skills necessary to fix one's own bicycle. Cognizant of the gendered division of labor and its complex relationship with transport and mobility, some groups have devised space-times that take into account women's double or triple shifts of both salaried and unpaid care work to ensure a broader range of women can participate (Coyotecatl Contreras & Díaz Alba, 2018). Also notable are the cycle rides that foreground girl's presence in the city and highlight their absence in most advocacy and planning discussions, typically centered on productive, adult mobilities. Other spaces are devised to challenge fear of urban night-scapes and "reclaim the night", such as the Ecuadorian feminist bike races that displace competitiveness as the driving force of participation, centering instead values of care through ludic interventions (Gamble, 2019). Attention to the critiques, practices, and alternatives being enacted in these feminist cycling spaces is necessary to make spaces for cycling that cater to a diverse range of needs, skills, and mobile practices. Failure to do so will re-inscribe the inequalities that have, until now, limited women and girls' cycle mobility, even in places where cycling infrastructure is widely provided.

## **6. Conclusion**

Throughout this text, we have explored a number of ways to make space for cycling that challenge the dominant approach to urban cycling -- building bike lanes. Starting from a Lefebvrian spatial framework that understands "space" as produced through three interrelated processes (conceived space, perceived space, and lived space), we have analyzed here temporary cycling spaces, policy spaces, and activist spaces to underscore our central claim: that making space for cycling involves more than infrastructural interventions. In this regard, we have problematized certain trends within

global urbanism, arguing that the language of “pop-up”, DIY or tactical urbanism insufficiently captures the complex process of experimentation that created and expanded Ciclovía, Bogotá’s famed open streets program, over the years. Rather, the concept of experimentation can be more fruitful to draw attention to the institutional frameworks that are necessary to support and sustain cycling. As lived spaces, temporary street closings depend on the resignification of automobile infrastructures, and political, technical and institutional coalitions to make them durable in time. What becomes clear is that making space for cycling often requires a vast network infrastructure of spaces for learning and persuasion to make the bicycle desirable for urban policymakers. Hence, forums, conferences and policy tours emerge as a key site in which space for cycling is made. There, particular representations of cycling space circulate amongst planners, urbanists, and activists who take back home with them experiences and stories of urban transformation in which the bicycle plays a central role. However, it is not just in these spaces of encounter that policy space for cycling is made. The internet and social media have provided pro-cycling activists and planners a rich space through which inspirational images, videos, and narratives of bicycle-driven urban change circulate. We cannot think of making space for cycling without considering the multiple actors, discourses, and sites through which cycling circulates, making space for cycling in the global policy landscape.

Finally, we discussed activist cycling spaces, seeking to elucidate how bottom-up initiatives work to enable diverse uses of the bicycle, and argue that making space for cycling need not be a top-down enterprise undertaken by mayors and policy elites. What these spaces do is broaden the scope of what we understand by “cycling” beyond commuting and leisure. Mass cycle rides, as a form of protest, work to subvert automobile space-time and make cycling a collectively enjoyed experience. Yet, cycling need not involve riding a bike. Hence we also drew on the experiences of community cycling initiatives to highlight how fixing a bike, or using the bicycle as an excuse to articulate communities can be just as important as building infrastructure. Furthermore, considering feminist cycling spaces helped us problematize the taken-for-granted assumptions about what kind of space is a space for everyone to cycle. The key lesson drawn from cycling activism here is that we should not stop at taking space to cycle, but use the bicycle to create spaces for integration and learning values of equity

and sustainability. This ought to be more conducive to lasting urban transformation than simply relying on cycling infrastructure to “do the trick”.

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