



NO **SOLUTION** FITS ALL: **ADAPTING** CYCLING PROGRAMMES
TO THE **LOCAL CONTEXT**, PRIORITIES & **OPPORTUNITIES**



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CHAPTER 7. NO SOLUTION FITS ALL: ADAPTING CYCLING PROGRAMMES TO THE

One of the first lessons that experienced city politicians, executives and planners learn is that problems and solutions tend to be similar in spite of different urban contexts. This realisation dispels a popular notion among cities, which calls for reinventing the wheel each time a problem arises. In reality what is needed is attention and open-mindedness towards the initiatives of other cities, coupled with the ability to adapt what is valuable and useful to local conditions. Cycling programmes must be tailored to the local topographic, financial, infrastructure and behavioural context. Highlighted cities include Berlin and Graz, amongst others.



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"A lack of urban space requires new concepts of mobility: creative solutions are needed to keep the city accessible in the future as well. To keep Utrecht attractive and accessible, we are focusing on public transport and cycling... Inhabitants of Utrecht do use their bicycle to travel to the city centre, but the level could grow. I want to install more bicycle parking facilities, improve the infrastructure for bikes, and I will appoint a bicycle coordinator who will integrate existing cycle policies."

*Frits Lintheijer,
Vice Mayor of Utrecht*

LOCAL CONTEXT, PRIORITIES & OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 National differences in background, institutional settings, and image

Cycling background, institutional settings, and image vary considerably across nations. In some countries, including many southern and eastern European countries, where the cycle share is low, cycling is not a topic on the national transport agenda and in public awareness. Other countries (e.g. NL, DK) which have a high share, invest in international promotion via cycling embassies to disseminate cycling know-how to other countries, regions and cities. If a national cycling strategy or action plan exists¹, cities and regions should seek to align as far as possible with the national strategy. Alignment with projects of national scope, such as the construction of a long-distance bicycle network along national highways and waterways can help provide the long-term support needed to promote cycling.

In many countries, cycling planning is part of urban or regional transport planning. However, specific responsibilities, national planning and integration, and funding sources often vary. For example, in Denmark, there is funding by the national government for new cycling infrastructure in cities, while in Germany, national funds are provided to cities only in a few exceptions or pilot projects. Approaches to winning funding are further discussed in Chapter 2.

The image of the bicycle also varies nationally and strategies should be adapted accordingly. Hungary, for example has a similar cycling share as Denmark, yet cycling is more common in rural areas and small towns in Hungary. The higher use of bicycles in those areas can be attributed to the fact that fewer people own a car. Therefore, it would be important for Hungarian cities to stabilise the high bicycle share by increasing the image of this means of transport and promoting its status when compared to the car.

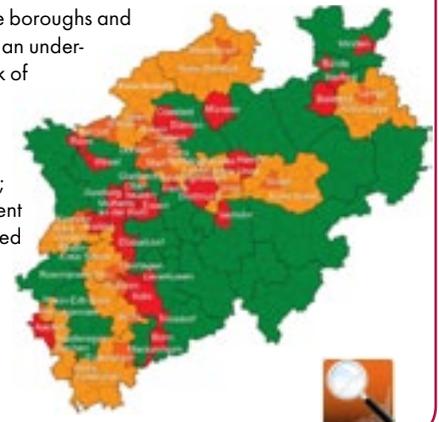
¹A good example: the National Cycling Strategy of Germany <http://www.bmvbs.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/89724/publicationFile/62136/nationaler-radverkehrsplan-2020.pdf>

7.2 Transferring city experiences within a country

Within a nation, cities also vary greatly. A low country-wide cycling share does not prevent cities from setting an example and achieving high city-wide cycling use and awareness. In France, for example, Lyon and Paris broke the ice for more cycling in French cities with their bike sharing systems and started an international revolution for more bike sharing. The Italian Cities of Ferrara, Ravenna, Reggio nell'Emilia and Bolzano paved the way for other Italian cities to follow. Each of these Italian cities are in the north where it does not get too hot. Cycling has been popular in these historic cities for a long time - the cities have provided facilities which have also helped cyclists protect their cultural heritage. Effective measures adopted by these cities include access restrictions for cars to the city centre. And, Bolzano's integrated strategy of infrastructure improvement and marketing for cycling helped increase its cycling share from 18% to 29% and decrease car use from 40% to 34% in the period from 2002 to 2009. In Spain, the cities of Barcelona, San Sebastian, Burgos and Seville were the trend-setters in cycling.

National city networks for cycling, such as the group of German Cities (AGFS, Figure 7.1) or the Network of the Italian bicycle officers can be valuable, as can national conferences and the exchange between and training of national bicycle officers. In some countries with examples of successful cycling programmes, city planning teams can orient themselves towards these national examples if regional conditions are relatively similar (e.g. culture, language, institutional settings and resources).

Cycling conditions also vary greatly from one section of a city and region to another. In some boroughs and rural areas, cyclists are hindered by an under-developed bike path network; a lack of alternate, biker-friendly routes; intersections that are less conducive to cycling (e.g. areas with traffic signal deficits); and a larger concentration of accident black spots. Prioritising disadvantaged sites when expanding the route network can help gradually reduce these disparities.



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"In 2011, we opened a cycle lane in the medieval city centre of Graz - an area with narrow streets and high building density. There is there, as in many other European cities, restricted space. But we took away 15 parking places to make more space for cyclists."

"Public participation is a key aspect in any decision-making process. In addition to making sense in itself, it is essential to ensure the feasibility of any measure."

Lisa Rucker, Deputy mayor of the city of Graz

7.3 Understanding the context of city successes

Success stories - whether real or perceived - and the pressure on politicians to copy these activities often dominate political debates on cycling policy. This best practice approach has a limited chance of success, but only if most of the preconditions mentioned above in the successful city also exist in the target city. If the preconditions are different, there is a serious risk of wasting money, frustration among stakeholders and ineffective cycling policy.

Furthermore, successful strategies and successful single measures must be differentiated. A strategy is a long-term plan of action consisting of several measures designed to achieve a defined target. A single measure may contribute to a defined target, but it could also be an obstacle if costs are high or other resources needed to implement effective measures are missing. The remaining sections discuss specific areas in which cities differ.

7.3.1 Snow, rain and hills

Inherently, city weather and topological conditions vary and these can affect cycling plans and strategies.

Some cities perceive cycling in winter as a barrier while others do not, showing the importance of city culture and mentality. In Oulu (FI), situated north of the Arctic Circle, temperatures are below freezing in five months of the year and within this period the city is also covered in snow. Nevertheless the cycling share is above 20%. This is a share that many cities with a much warmer climate do not reach. The example of Oulu could help other cities to promote cycling also during the colder season. Of course, cities should still strive for an inviting environment for winter cyclists as Copenhagen does, for instance. There is a clear priority to clean cycling paths from snow before other parts of the roads are cleared. Such a measure signals to the cyclists that they are welcome in the city every day of the year. Other cities start on a different level and have to provide winter cyclists with appropriate information as a first step. Of course the winter cyclists also have to be provided with the appropriate information and with positive recognition (like hot tea and cookies for winter cyclists in Vienna) or the promotion of spike-tires for bicycles in Graz.

Leisure time cyclists will argue that cycling is an activity for good weather conditions, and not suitable for rainy days. However, rain does not prevent people from cycling - like snow, it depends simply on the prevailing country culture. In Dutch and Danish cities alike, there are many cyclists on the roads on rainy days. And there are many more rainy days in these countries than in Southern European cities. However, if you consider a 30 minute cycle ride to work, then even in rainy places it will only rain, on average, a small number of days in the year in that 30 minute time slot. Of course cycling in the rain is more favourable with appropriate clothing. Apart from providers for outdoor equipment there are apparel companies making clothing that makes cycling in the rain fashionable. Rainy days also show the difference in cycling culture, while Italians like to cycle with their umbrella it is forbidden to do that by the Austrian road code.

In the Dutch city of Groningen the cyclists are rewarded with a very special service on rainy days. Traffic lights for cyclists have been equipped with rain sensors ensuring that cyclists get a green light more often when it rains. This is a clever way to prioritise bicycle traffic in bad weather conditions over motorists that are in a protected environment anyway.





A hilly topography is a barrier for cyclists. Solutions like the bike lift in Trondheim did not find many followers in other cities. Investigations in the hilly Austrian town of Weiz confirmed their hills are a barrier for cyclists. Yet the city administration did not accept that as an indication that they are not a cycling city. They decided to promote the use of Pedelecs and E-bikes. In this way even hilly cities and regions are able to increase their cycling share. The same is true for the hilly city of Stuttgart where a Pedelec-Sharing system was implemented to increase the popularity of this transport mode. The possibility to transport bicycles uphill with the public transport, e.g. by tram in Trieste (IT), by bus as in some US regions or with an elevator in Lisbon (PT) are local solutions that can be appropriate for certain niches but with no potential for mass use.

7.3.2 Bicycle parking

There are tailor-made bicycle parking solutions, including those for regions where bicycle theft is a serious problem and there is a need for a large number of bicycle stands and high quality locks to assure that the bicycle will still be there when the cyclist returns.

There are other regions, like the Danish city of Odense where more fragile bicycle locking facilities are adequate such as retractable bicycle stands. These are placed mainly in inner cities and are not visible when there is no bicycle locked there. However, this is not a solution in cities where regular street cleaning is necessary during the winter months - but they are an elegant solution for some historic city centres. In some places cycle stands are even sculptures, whose feasibility can depend on available funding.

Protected parking for bicycles where people live is very important because the bike is stored overnight. However, these solutions are best considered in the planning phase. In Graz, a guideline for building projects is in use which helps to integrate cycle parking from the very beginning. Car parking not immediately adjacent to the housing in collective garages helps to increase the cycle share. As the distance to walk to one's car increases, bicycle use becomes more favourable. The Dutch culture of collective garages instead of underground parking is part of their success in supporting bicycle traffic. In Vienna, entire buildings are constructed for cycle minded inhabitants.



7.3.3 Combining cycling with other modes of transport

Combining public transport with the bicycle using "Bike & Ride" offers at stations of public transport is a well-known activity adopted by many cities. Travelling with the bike or foldable bike with train and bus is another solution in times and areas with little bike traffic.

"Park & Bike" solutions are less popular but can be realised by putting a folding bike into the boot of a car or by storing a commuter bike at the car parking site. These solutions are linked to the culture of using foldable bikes. In the UK and other countries this has been promoted as a possibility for taking the bike in the train or in the car.

These intermodal combinations might be established as a complimentary system to the more popular Park & Ride solutions that combine the use of car and Public Transport. It is worth noting that cycling and public transport are not competitors. Both modes can help the usage of the other.

7.3.4 Traffic lights

Traffic light regulations differ amongst European societies, but in some cases, traffic rules can be changed to be more bicycle friendly. Such regulations help cyclists without causing any additional costs. France, for example recently introduced a new traffic regulation that permits cyclists to turn right at red traffic lights. In Denmark, the "turn-right-solution" for cyclists was implemented via infrastructural interventions. A "bypass" guides the cyclist past the red light and spares the cyclists the necessity to stop. This solution requires enough space at the junction.

Other traffic light interventions that show cyclists that they are valued citizens include the "green wave at intersections" for cyclists implemented in Danish cities and the priority given to Dutch cyclists at traffic lights.



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7.3.5 Moving goods by bike

A remarkable number of trips in urban areas are related to the transport of goods. Very often goods transport is associated with the necessity of car or lorry use. However, considering weight and volume, most goods could also be transported by bicycle, bicycle trailer or cargo bike. There is the potential to shift professional deliveries provided by logistics companies (e.g. Outspoken, Gnewt, Yellow Jersey) as well as shop-related deliveries (e.g. pizza delivery or home delivery services of supermarkets) from the car to the bicycle.

Cities with narrow roads and high quality pavement may be better prepared to adopt cargo bicycles as a solution. There is also a need for cities to adopt innovative logistic solutions for storage of goods in these cases. Examples are the micro consolidation centres in London or the Bento-box system in Berlin.

Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, best demonstrates the high acceptance possible for cargo bicycles. Copenhagen has 520,000 inhabitants and 25,000 cargo bikes that are mainly used for private logistics (e.g. transport of children or shopping) but also for professional purposes – as cargo bicycles are an integrated part of Copenhagen's logistics concept. The potential for the use of cargo bikes is very high: 25% out of all trips (this equals 42% of all motorised trips) in European cities could be easily shifted to cargo cycling.



7.3.6 Rental bikes

Rental bike schemes are a big success in many European cities and especially in cities where the bicycle use was low in the past. In French cities, for instance, rental bikes replace bikes owned by individuals for everyday use. Therefore there is also much less requirement to park private bikes on the street.

In countries with a high bike share and a high private bicycle ownership there is more of a need for targeted systems. In the Netherlands, the National Railways run a very successful customised bicycle rental scheme that supports the intermodal transport system.

In the Belgian City of Ghent there is a special bicycle rental system for students that has more than 6000 yellow bikes. The motivation was to provide safe bicycles (lightweight, good brakes, etc.) to a user group that usually uses old bikes. At the same time this familiarises students with the feeling of cycling with high quality equipment and hence increases the chance that they will continue to cycle in later life.

The Technical University in Graz provides its employees with high quality company bikes (more than 700) that can also be used privately. These bicycles were financed with parking fees from motorists parking at the university grounds.



"The citizens of Odense know that whatever the weather does, the paths will be free... Cold and snow is no reason not to cycle."

*Mr. Steen Møller,
Mayor for Culture and Urban Planning, Odense*



7.4 Conclusion

The issues related to cycling use depend on the specific culture and conditions of a country and a given city. Examples of varying conditions have been described in this chapter.

Despite this need for customisation, there is a huge amount of experience in many cities throughout Europe and abroad. Cities can now learn from this wide range of schemes, strategies, projects and innovation all over Europe. And, this body of knowledge is continually growing. Organisations like POLIS, EURO-CITIES and others can help disseminate collective knowledge as can several EU-Projects including CIVITAS.



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