

Cycle Campaigning for a Just City

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ABSTRACT

Campaigning bodies and local actions and activism have significant impacts on the development of local infrastructural plans for cycling. These voices are frequently homogenized as presenting a unified voice. For strategic reasons, this may be an appropriate tactic. Yet in doing so, important dimensions of discussion can be missed, especially those that rethink the urban environment beyond the immediate focus of change. This paper examines a particular set of disputes between proponents of vehicular cycling and those concerned with a broader vision of mobility justice. Using ethnographic and autoethnographic methods, it shows how there are important issues of gender politics hidden in these discussions. A secondary concern of the study, arising from the research methodology, is to acknowledge and show the location of academic research within campaign communities. These analyses have implications for how planning and consultation processes are developed and implemented.

KEYWORDS: Cycle campaigning, (auto)ethnography, vehicular cycling, mobility justice, gender politics.

1. Introduction

Its value recognized by international declaration as “an equal mode of transport and as an integral part of an intermodal mobility chain” (EU2018.at, 2018) and as fully worthy of transnational government attention and prioritization (UNECE, 2021), cycling demands academic investigation. As active travel, it has an impact upon both those who undertake cycle journeying, and upon those who do not, providing improvements in both individual wellbeing and the common good (de Nazelle et al., 2011; Litman, 2014). Those not undertaking travel by cycle are benefitted through the offset gains made by those who do; emissions reductions, air quality improvement, noise pollution reductions, improved social and economic equity. It is spatially efficient, affordable, provides inexpensive access to work, education and other venues of public life and can impart independence, dignity and health to its users (Gerike and Parkin, 2015, Muralidharan and Prakash, 2017; Pucher & Buehler 2021). However, despite these multiple individual and social benefits, rates of cycling remain low in Anglophone Western countries (Pucher and Buehler 2008), and it continues to be primarily a man’s rather than a woman’s modal reality (Garrard et al., 2012).

Research into cycling over the past two decades shows distinctive patterns of growth. Social scientific research in general has long been more at ease with investigations of phenomena

deviating from existing social norms (sometimes even labelled as pathological behaviours). It is not surprising, therefore, to see a significant emergence of studies on cycling originating from localities where levels of cycling are low, and the focus accordingly to be on individual behaviours and choices (Bonham and Johnson, 2015). Locations where quotidian cycling levels are much higher, and it has become a relatively unremarkable phenomenon, have not been absent from the research field, but the questions posed have necessarily been different, framed in relation to mundane behaviours and more logically concerned with wider comparative analysis (see Oldenziel et al., 2016; Bunte and Cox, 2019; Oosterhuis, 2020).

Beyond the social science disciplines, technical research in the fields of transport geography, engineering and urban design and in transport studies has predominantly concentrated on extensive datasets and their analysis, resulting for instance in infrastructure preferences and route choices (for example Scarf and Grehan 2005; Broach et al., 2012).

Among the lesser studied topics is the relation between cycling and sociopolitical change (although there are significant exceptions, for example Tan and Lopez, 2020). This paper is designed to contribute to that literature by connecting an analysis of cycling subjects and subjectivities to concepts of the Just City (Fainstein 2010; 2014). In particular, it examines the mechanisms through which collective action contributes to, and forms, new urban subjectivities. Its authors bring two diverse but related perspectives to bear. Leyendecker draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork among activists and her own autoethnography as a participant in the campaigns. Cox draws on more theoretical reflections, derived from extensive reflections and long teaching and supervisory experience in social movement studies as well as a dataset of historical and contemporary international cycle campaigns and advocacy (Cox, 2021). Leyendecker became engaged in the world of British cycle campaigners in 2010 with the perspective of an 'outsider', not habituated to the socio-political intricacies and histories of British local and national cycling traditions and struggles. Growing up in North Germany with its double-figured cycling levels and comparatively normalised cycling culture, she came to Newcastle upon Tyne as a student in the 1990s where she worked as a civil engineer for a number of years before co-founding a cycling campaign. The unsatisfactory cycling conditions in Newcastle, a city with low levels of cycling, politicised her into taking action. Cox grew up in British environmental and peace activism in the 1980s and joined actively in local cycle campaigns in the 1990s. As a non-driver he was by default interested in cycling as transport: cycle campaigning appeared to be a logical extension of prior campaigning for sustainability and social change. Pursuing academic analysis of the sociology of cycling since 2005 he also brings perspectives from transnational cycle advocacy from extensive work with the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF). The two authors bring different personal backgrounds, academic disciplines and practices to the study but share recognition of the importance of social movement auto/biographies (Waterman et al., 2016).

This paper follows explores how knowledge - and therefore expertise - is formed: not within academic study but within the pressure groups themselves. That there is overlap and continuity (as well as discontinuity and divergence) between these two groups is a commonplace, but for examination here, primacy is given to the creation of voice and vision in participant

communities. Currently a significant area of research in social movement studies (see Pleyers, 2010; L. Cox, 2018), interest in knowledge generation and perspectives is also fed by a large literature concerned with “knowledges born in struggle”. In other words, the ways of forming understandings of how the world is, its problems and potential solutions, that arise in subaltern activist communities (Santos and Meneses, 2020). The paper is thus concerned with the politics of knowledge arising from the engagement of everyday activism (compare Jansen 2019). Methodologically it follows a slightly unconventional approach in that the data section is arranged in the form of a dialogue, drawn from empirical sources and fieldwork notes, subject to later reflexive analysis. It considers how knowledge and understanding emerge in campaigning communities, the forces that shape it and how these perspectives address the city, specifically the idea of the ‘Just City’ explored in the work of Susan Fainstein (2010; 2014).

Fainstein is insistent that her use of the term ‘city’ is not one that is limited to specifically urban areas but defined as “any spatially defined unit that constitutes the object of planning” (Fainstein, 2005: 122). It is a term of convenience rather than being denotive of any specific form of urban agglomeration. Fainstein argues that urban policy should be normative, it should have a goal. Moreover, its goal should not simply be the achievement of increased competitiveness but should be oriented towards a concept of justice that “can improve the life of citizens” (Fainstein 2014, 1). This is not an abstract ideological argument but a recognition of existing realities: “There are many decisions, especially involving housing, transport, and recreation, made at the local level that differentially affect people’s quality of life” (Fainstein, 2014: 14). In relation to urban cycling these decisions can be played out in the concrete realities of infrastructure (Cox and Koglin, 2020). Three principals operate in tension in her construction of justice: equity, diversity and democracy. These are not a harmonious fit, but a source of (creative) conflict. Ultimately, she argues, equity should be given priority within this triad of values that compete for policy attention. She recognises that there is also a diversity of ways of thinking about urban justice, reflecting a diversity of philosophical and ideological positions that she categorises as the just city/spatial justice, communicative rationality, and recognition of diversity. In this study, we want to examine how activists intuitively employ these Just City approaches and logics to campaign for cycleways in their respective cities to improve their mobility needs. This approach supplies a second set of perspectives to the existing academic-as-activist analyses of cycle planning and urban justice (see for example, Ribiero 2018). Again, this reflects a commitment in this paper to acknowledge the priority of activist knowledge, not simply as proof of concept for academic speculation, but the obverse, to recognise that academic analyses derive their validity as derivative abstractions from the ideas generated “in struggle” (Santos and Meneses, 2020). It also seeks to insure against the erasure of those whose voices and actions are responsible for initiating urban transformation by professionals who may adopt but decontextualize and depoliticise their solutions (Spataro, 2016).

Global studies on cycle activism and activists have grown commensurately with the rapid expansion of cycling studies in general (Gamble, 2017; Cooper and Leahy, 2017; Johnson et al., 2018; Candipan, 2019; Lemos, 2020). However, although brilliant analyses of participants and participation, many of these remain politically at the descriptive level without asking further,

how these actions relate to other struggles and how they relate to other goals (Dunlap et al., 2020). Significantly, the literature on cycling in the context of wider social justice, while voicing pertinent criticism of some cycling activism and policy making (Caimotto, 2020), rarely delves into the complexities of the internal dynamics of campaigning groups (see Hoffman, 2016 for an important exception). There are valuable papers engaging with social movement theories to provide insight into cycle campaigning but to date these have utilised particular social movement studies perspectives to provide insight within the context of other disciplinary fields, for example in transport studies or mobilities (Aldred, 2012). Studies of cycle activism in the social movements' literature remain notable by their rarity (though see Hoffman, 2011).

Deliberately bridging disciplinary perspectives this paper consciously employs methodological techniques and perspectives from within social movement studies that has a long history of struggling to bridge the divides – potential and or real – between activist and academic knowledges. As the editorial explanation for *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*, one of the leading journals in the field states, it “seeks to share learning between different social movement struggles and movements in different places and to develop dialogue between activist and academic understandings and between different political and intellectual traditions.” (L. Cox, 2019). Notably, across the spectrum of cycling research, Oosterhuis (2014; 2016) showed how it has its own activist agenda, centralising around the question “why don't people cycle more?”, concealing a normative expectation that they should. This observation is unsurprising given the biographical histories and social commitments of those who select cycling as their topic of study. Although readily acknowledged and even celebrated, reflexivity on this distinct positionality is less common. In bringing autoethnographic dimensions into this analysis of activist narratives, the authors seek to engage in a more reflexive analysis of knowledge formation.

Specifically, this paper seeks to relate the voices and debates among cycle campaigners to the concept of the Just City, joining a growing literature on urban mobilities and the rights to the city, particularly visible in South American studies (for example, Troncoso et al., 2018; Castañeda, 2019). The paper asks how a particular group of activists frame their cycle campaigning, what they campaign for, and notes changes in campaigning strategies that clash with older styles of organising. It consciously looks to challenge a simple direct identification of activism and activists with the expressed goals of campaigns around which they mobilise, and which use to attract wider publics and support. In other words, we argue against the assumption that cycle campaigns and campaigners need only (or even primarily) be interested in cycling. In particular, the study is interested in the experiences of women activists lobbying for cycleways in the UK and Germany.

The cycle campaigners interviewed were at the forefront of challenging a persistent status quo in transport, and it would be apt to admit that automobility has remained a 'driving force' in many a city politics and for its publics. Change comes slow for cycling, and spatial changes even slower (Spotswood et al., 2015). Infrastructure is now changing dramatically in some cities where cycle-specific routes have been built – prominent examples of which are London, New York, Sevilla, and Paris. When previously the engineers had 'command and control' charge of

the city, we are currently in a “sociotechnical transition in cities”, according to Vreugdenhil and Williams (2013: 284). New technical approaches, such as the construction of cycleways, are changing the urban fabric, bringing new possibilities to social worlds, enabling new lived realities to emerge. During responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, these trends have been accelerated and informal tactical urbanism transformed into legitimate infrastructural intervention (Cox, 2022). We argue here that that these processes make it even more urgent to pose the questions of “what is cycling for?” and “who is cycling for?”. To provide initial response, we further argue the need to frame cycling activism in terms of a Just City not just a cycling city. The analyses forged in the activism studied makes cycling spatial and casts a wider radius for the cycling constituent: aiming to democratise cycling.

1.1 What should urban cycling look like?

There are long-standing arguments, especially prevalent in Anglophone discussion, as to the appropriate physical location for cycling. Horton (2007: 143) describes a “long-standing contentiousness, among British cyclists’ organizations, of off-road cycling routes”. This stems from historic fear of segregated (or separated, or more recently protected) cycling routes as tools to remove cyclists’ hard won, historic right to the road effectively restricting cycle travel only to those routes and destinations served by such routes. Of course, all cycling infrastructure (as with all travel infrastructure) only works when continuous and fully connected. As Hudson (1978) noted, the implementation of separated cycle routing in Britain from the 1930s failed to meet those basic conditions, and its rejection by cycling organizations was understandable. Reid (2015) shows how subsequent cycle planning schemes associated with new town developments similarly failed. In the context of defense of the right to travel by road, the emergence of advocacy or what is known as vehicular cycling has some logic.

‘Vehicular cycling’, promoted by key figures such as John F Franklin (in the United Kingdom) and John Forester (in the United States), proposes that cyclists gain respect and space on the road by behaving like a vehicle (Aldred, 2012: 95). The way in which Forester’s particular vision of vehicular cycling came to be adopted as policy in the USA is forensically analyzed by Epperson (2014). Reflecting on the inherited legacy of these approaches he concludes harshly that:

“American cycle advocacy exists in a world of cognitive dissonance largely disconnected from political, social, technical or economic realities” ... “club cyclists are the least likely demographic to actually use their bicycles as transport, and for the most part they are uninterested in those groups who do” (Epperson, 2014: 165)

More recently, however, and significantly as a result of new generations of cycle advocates, vehicular cycling has lost traction in the USA (Golub et al., 2016; Schultheiss et al., 2018). The most recent (2019) rewrite of the AAHSTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities

explicitly refers to its new aim “to support inclusive bicycling for All Ages and Abilities serving the widest spectrum of bicyclists” (Toole Design, n.d.).

In the UK training guidance was developed by combining “elements of Forester’s *Effective Cycling* with RoSPA’s [the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents] already-existing training manual for motor-cycle roadcraft” (Epperson, 2014: 185). Although updated standards and guidance have been published in the UK and USA since 2018, there remains a stubborn legacy of attitudes and discourses around cycling. This is particularly notable where personnel responsible for policy delivery and implementation at local levels remain in post (White et al., 2020; Brezina et al., 2020). The same applies where trainers are drawn from an older generation grounded in prior expectations of vehicular cycling. Curricula may change but the experiences and perceptions of those delivering them may be harder to overcome. New generations of activists in the USA and the UK have a significant legacy to confront.

Aldred (2012) showed how firmly vehicular cycling was enshrined in UK policy, quoting from the *Cycling Infrastructure Design* policy text: “There is seldom the opportunity to provide an off-carriageway route within the highway boundary that does not compromise pedestrian facilities or create potential hazards for cyclists, particularly at side roads” (2012: 96). Interpreting this text, it is clear that opportunity covers both space and finances: cycling can have and clearly warrants neither. While official UK design guidance has changed significantly since Aldred’s article (see DfT 2020a; DfT2020b) the concept remains firmly embedded cycle training (the course is called BikeAbility, level 3 is focused on road skills) implicitly suggesting that on-road cycling is and should be the norm even while design guidance and vision documents recognize and set out clearly that protected infrastructure is essential for increasing cycling levels.

The phenomenon of vehicular cycling is closely allied to the issue of ‘segregation’: whether cycling *should* run on separated cycleways protected from motor traffic. As noted in the UK, policy communities tended historically to be unconvinced of ‘segregation’ (Aldred, 2013). The result of the legacy of vehicular cycling policies in the UK is that dedicated cycleways are rare, sometimes cycle infrastructure consist of narrow lanes on shared footways, and, should on-road painted-on lanes be present, they are “patchy” (Aldred, 2012: 96). Excepting notable examples, this pattern remains dominant.

For all the talk of a cycling renaissance and the publication of new aspirational government ‘vision’ documents (DfT, 2020b) design guidance (DfT, 2020a), localized provision remains poor. Campaigners have little confidence that the new guidance will have any more impact than previous generations of design standards have had. Despite the insistence of hierarchy of provision for cycle traffic since 2008 (DfT, 2008) and valuable official documentation in planning for cycling to update and develop these principles (Gallagher and Parkin, 2014), the reality of implementation falls significantly short of meaningful interventions. Many local authorities continue to solve problems of conflict between motor vehicles and cycle users by seeking to eliminate cycle users, reducing them to pedestrian traffic and or forcing them onto paths and into enclosures not suitable for cycling. Shared use paths, another favored solution, are frequently unsuitably surfaced and fail to take account of the different characteristics and

requirements of pedestrian and cycle traffic (Parkin, 2018). The impact of a new statutory body with oversight powers, Active Travel England instituted in January 2012 (after delays due to arguments over the extent of its powers and remit), accompanied by changes to the Highway Code, remains to be seen.

Despite the rise in levels witnessed during Covid lockdown measures, cycling in the UK continues to be a marginal activity: stigmatised (Horton, 2007), and the practice of a “minority out-group” (Walker, 2012). Out of that social marginalisation, the issues of identity and constituency arise:

“Like other social movement organisations cycling organisations struggle with issues of identity. For whom do they speak? For the cyclist, and if so which cyclist? For potential cyclists – which could be almost the entire population?”
(Aldred 2012:102)

Jones et al (2012: 1422) found that the “majority of the public will not entertain the idea of developing the cycling skills and ‘survivalist’ strategies to cope with riding amongst motorised traffic”. A decade later, even official policy recognises this truism, yet there remains a disparity with cycle training which remains (as noted above) “insistent that today’s youngsters must be trained to ride on the road [in traffic]” (Horton, 2007: 144). Of course, the reality is that, at present with the woeful state of provision and cyclists aiming to complete a journey to access shops, schools, social space as and venues will have to conduct a significant part of their journey on road. Network provision, continues to emphasise leisure routes and circuits that, ironically, can only be meaningfully accessed by road, often at a distance from urban centres, resulting in increased car use so that families can go cycling together.

Excluding from debate large swathes of the population because they are not cycling is problematic in campaigning messages and tactics. It narrows the debate and locks cycling into a “educated, masculine middle class” future, shaping agendas and demands only in relation to this constituent (Balkmar and Summerton, 2017: 162). As Aldred says, it is a “struggle to define their constituency, cycle campaigners of all stripes claim to speak for potential cyclists rather than only current cyclists” (2012: 97). Yet conventional campaign groups insist that more people should cycle when the informational (rather than spatial) strategies employed to date have failed to increase cycling in the UK (Spotswood et al., 2015). Until recently, these cleavages in infrastructure and vision in cycle campaigning remained the subject of internal debate. Here we seek to explore them by placing voice and reflection ahead of recommendations for action.

2. Methods

The primary data sources used here come from interviews with women campaigners and blog entries undertaken as part of Leyendecker’s autoethnographic PhD study “women activists’

experience of local cycling politics” (Leyendecker, 2019). Secondary material comes from ongoing fieldnotes compiled by Cox over a twenty-year period (see Cox, 2021 for details). A constant concern in studies of activism is that the academic study of other’s activism can all too easily lead to extractivism, where the subject of investigation is simply mined as a raw material for interview data to feed the academic publishing and career of the researcher. A scepticism towards conventional information gathering methods involving human subjects is a necessary outcome of re-evaluating research methods in light of Santos’ arguments on imperialist epistemologies. As he argues, “Postabyssal scientific knowledge is always coknowledge emerging from processes of knowing-with rather than knowing-about. Its autonomy is relative. It requires constant self-reflexivity in order to fulfil the double criterion of trust” (Santos, 2018: 147). We need also recognise that as researcher we stand in a privileged position inasmuch as being present and participating in cycle campaigning discussions, we as academics have a dual role and responsibility as we have the time and resources to reflect on those actions in ways not necessarily available to our interviewees.

A second dimension of reflection on researching cycling activism is that, as discussants, researchers are not merely witnesses to the discussions recorded, but part of them, contributors to the conversations, meetings and outcomes reported. We as researchers are part of the outcomes of the action researched; hence the legitimacy of the autoethnographic and the need for integrity and reflexivity as part of that process. One compromise of the academic/activist position, as of all participant-observation and observer-participant study is that immediate concerns of action may not allow sufficient time for wider reflection. Understanding needs time to develop, reflection cannot be rushed. Hence this study draws on data and notes gathered over a longer period than normally might be expected.

Five years after co-founding the cycle campaign network and on commencing her PhD work, Leyendecker began a blog as a space to publicly reflect on her personal campaigning experience, to report and, increasingly over time, to reflect on events. Over three years, to December 2017, this produced 179 posts in total, wordcount 123,000, average post length 700 words (*katsdekker.wordpress.com*). She wrote the blog as an “activist-academic” (Askins, 2009) conforming with McKenna and Pole’s (2007: 100) typical political blogger as “informer, watchdog, activist”. The blog was almost entirely written in English. However, as she connected more and more with Germany through her research, she also wrote the occasional post in German. She analysed the blog data using qualitative thematic coding. Additionally, eight in-depth semi-structured interviews with leading women activists in cycleway campaigning took place in 2017 in the UK and Germany in the native language of the participant. Translations provided here are by Leyendecker. Working together as women multiplied the chance to speak productively about the subject of power, as women often stay outside power structures, making it easier for them to critique these (Smith 1987). The interviews were about the activists’ experience in campaigning: characteristic views, their practices, and conceptualisation of politics and civic society. Transcriptions were conventionally analysed using narrative and thematic analysis.

The following section presents both interview material (identified pseudonymously), blogposts and later reflection, in which Leyendecker's voice [KL] is joined by commentary from Cox [PC] in the form of dialogic conversation. Participant comments are coded in text as (D) and (UK) to indicate geographic origin. All date references are to the specific blogpost entries, to be found at <https://katsdekker.wordpress.com>. The discussion is coded thematically. Together these weave a set of narratives that can be viewed, as Lofland describes them, as "movement stories", expressions that together create the cultural worlds of movement activists. "To read the writings of movement members and to listen to them talk among themselves is to encounter a stream of what we might think of as 'movement stories' or when they're compressed as 'movement slogans'" (Lofland, 1995: 204). It is through this story-creation that social movement cultures form and in presenting them here we try to remain faithful to the injunction to co-create knowledge in the spirit argued by Santos (above).

3. Findings

This chapter is made up of two sections, traversing the ground from 'The Old' to 'The New' in terms of styles of campaigning. More recent campaigners, like Leyendecker, highlight the importance of spatial justice and were often frustrated by the old campaigning style demanding liberal justice, rights and improved identity. The thematic observations gained from new activists' interviews are framed by a dialogic conversation between Leyendecker and Cox (in sub-sections 3.1.1. and 3.2.3)

3.1 Theme 1 The Old: vehicular cycling

3.1.1 Blog and reflections:

[KL] Upon entering the cycle campaigning world in 2010, I quickly noticed some particularities. It often felt as if I had stepped onto hollowed trodden grounds: campaigning felt like "pitching a tent in a tribal landscape" ([2016/03/03](#)). It often was a confusing experience. In Newcastle I could not help but observe cyclists' sheer determination. Yet this enthusiasm, did not compare well with the patchwork of campaigning methods and styles:

[T]he cycling community (people who cycle) [...] is dedicated to what they would call 'their' cycling cause. But that alone doesn't make us campaigners, and so, not surprisingly, many aren't. [2015/01/17](#)

[PC] I've often wondered about the differences between organisational styles in activist groups. Smock (2004) has a brilliant map where she correlates different models of community organising in the USA with distinctive theories of urban change, ways of organising the local community and affecting the public sphere. I'm convinced that there's no way you could make the same observation here in the UK, I've seen few systematic or consistent approaches.

[KL] The cycle campaigning scene was full of personalities and opinions, but less so of empathy and solidarity. I had ideas too, but the capacity of others to listen to a newcomer was low.

I was surrounded by many “old men with grey beards” who lectured and explained age-old things to me. I listened patiently to their same failed rhetoric, same myths and spoke against them. I was left wondering if I were heard at all, and how often the Beards have put down these views before.
([2016/03/03](#))

[PC] Oh, cycle activism has had these for years! You can see similar discussions in the pages of the *CTC Gazette* back in the 1930s. Letter writers make disparaging comments about women’s contributions to cycling, but it’s also interesting to see the robust rebuttals that these usually get.

[KL] I grew increasingly critical about the “grey-bearded” UK cyclist extolling their 'cycling is fun' and 'getting more people cycling'. I strongly felt that the endeavour cannot be just about cycling. We would have to be honest about cycling and “get real”; take into account wider realities. “Let’s face it. Cycling in the UK currently isn’t fun (convenient, safe, comfortable...)” ([2016/04/09](#)), most of the time it’s stressful and uncomfortable.

Most of the people I did my cycle campaigning with didn’t favour on-road cycling. Just looking around and talking to people showed that. Being a cyclist in the UK and being a cycle campaigner now were two entirely different things to me. I wondered in a blogpost about the sourcing of “the campaigners from the current cycling community without training, education and awareness about campaigning” ([2015/01/17](#)).

[PC] I was lucky that in the local cycle campaign in which I was first involved in there were experienced campaigners who had organizational skills and knowledge to pass on. But I’ve definitely seen the phenomena you are talking about elsewhere. I think what made the difference was that those with campaigning and organizing experience campaigners had come into action on cycling from mobilizing on other issues, not as ‘cyclists’. Indeed the local campaign organization was set up in distinction from (to be honest, almost in opposition to) existing cyclists’ representation bodies.

[KL] So much energy gets wasted in diversions that don’t maintain focus: “Strong campaigns stay strong when they have a strong message of common good which is squarely aimed at the people who can practically do something about it” (2016/04/15). I valued community organisers as well as political campaigners, but effective political campaigning was missing. The above blogposts took place before the interviews, but in them the same concerns appeared both in England and in Germany.

3.1.2 Interviews: homogenizing the cycling experience

The women activists I interviewed recurrently identified a certain type of cyclist. One interviewee called this type the “lycra people [...] some are women, and majority men” (UK1). This group, more specifically, often consisted of “men [who] were running things, happy to be riding with the traffic, don't want to be slowed down” explained D2. The typical “lycra type” would claim that “[cyclists] all want the same for cycling, that the people who want to cycle are all the same” (D5).

Anyone who disagrees or doesn't cycle because of the reality of their fears gets dismissed and hidden by this narrative. It homogenises a huge diversity of experience and can become disdainful, even dismissive, of those who don't conform.

Many of us are excluded and labelled weak [by the cyclist rhetoric], and that apparent weakness is unworthy and 'less than' [...] they are not only denigrating women, but rather everyone who they label as weak, worthless or meek [...] their concept of human nature allows saying to others that the others are deficient. (D5)

Interviewee D1 named that group (of lycra-clad campaigners) explicitly as “vehicular cyclists”. The terminology was more readily used by some interviewees than others, but all could describe the phenomenon as a view that presumes cycling to be safer on the road and that with learning the vehicular-cycling skills people will come to enjoy cycling in motor traffic.

Attempting an explanation, one interviewee outlined that vehicular cyclists themselves experienced exclusion and wanted group cohesion.

“Vehicular cyclists suffer from not being fully accepted in society [...] from the start, not taken seriously, [it does not appear to the vehicular-cyclist campaigner] that there could be good reasons, and that others are capable to know their own needs and that they are smart too” (D5).

This vehicular cyclist existed for both UK and German interviewees. In the UK it was understood as a reflection on the low numbers and the need to secure an embattled identity. Yet the same phenomenon could be observed in Germany, where, with higher cycling rates, the need to assert identity is lower. Perhaps explanations need further thought.

[PC] I wonder if the distinction is similar to historic ones in the Suffrage movement. Irrespective of individuals views on tactics, there were clear divisions between those who assumed that gaining the right to vote would change things and those for whom voting rights were only part of larger struggles for change. Are arguments on cycling activism often also about rights versus justice?

3.1.3 Interviews: dominating force

D1 suggested that there was a totalising, machismo, narcissistic and non-conformist attitude in the vehicular-cycling personality, which “extends to the type of cycling they do: contingent on confrontations with cars [...] insisting on rights [...] rebelling against state authority”. It only took a few vehicular cyclists in a campaigning scene, already a small minority in both UK and Germany, for this bravura identity to wipe other interests and voices from the social and political plane. One interviewee talked about her unpleasant experience and called it “shocking, how a minority can so forcefully dominate the debate for 20 years and thereby destroy a politics promoting cycling for all” (D1).

According to a couple of interviewees, the vehicular cyclist lobby had been successful in the past. For instance, the pervasiveness of the vehicular-cyclist lobby was demonstrated by a city senator proclaiming that “cyclists are safer on the road” (D1, D3), reciting a vehicular-cycling mantra without hesitation. The ‘cycling is safer on the roads’ statement was asserting precisely what the vehicular cyclists sought, cycling on the road and not on cycleways - and the politician had adopted the statement and was using it without much thought. The endurance of the statement, also drew this reaction by another interviewee: “The number of times I have to hear ‘someone is objectively safer on the road’ despite the fact what I subjectively feel, it's like I could scream!” (D2)

The persistence of this vehicular-cycling belief is understood as “dreadful, [...] we activists now have our work cut out” expressed D1, when talking in the context of city governance. In 2017 when the interviews were held, this woman activist commented on the ‘cyclists are safer on the road’ mantra of the vehicular cyclists:

I can't see anywhere that there is a central place that is putting that message out. It just seems to have spread [...] it's just like I said I can't figure out where it comes from - it's just sort of there now! (D2)

With local voices continuing to promote vehicular cycling meant that “for now we are cycling with HGVs and buses, which is awful” said D4. Tempers could flare on both sides. This interviewee expressed her frustration frankly: “largely speaking, VC types really aren’t my type [...] their idea is idiotic.” (D5).

German interviewees reported on recent changes in cycle campaigning at the national level. The national ADFC (Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad Club, Germany’s national cycling lobby) adopted a clear pro-cycleways policy and ‘cycling for all’ agenda in 2016/7. But change is slow, and some local branches of the ADFC have continued to be ‘manned’ by vehicular cyclists, because “now to say that they were not totally right doing so, that's hard to admit” (D2).

[PC] I’ve witnessed the same painful dilemmas for campaigners in the UK having to work through times of transition.

3.2 Theme 2. The New: cycling for all

3.2.1 Blog and reflections: for a common good

For me [KL], it was paramount to work within civic society on the whole (i.e., finding allies and more like-minded campaigning partners to grow the campaign effort). There was a number of national groups, but cooperation was making for slim pickings. On the blog I lamented that focus, language and purpose were often not aligned.

The “cycling community” has not managed to burst out of their own bubble and still often sits in an echo chamber “talking to themselves”. Narratives, stories and pictures are as yet missing. Cooperation and coordination to create coherence is needed. 2016/02/26

Any opportunity for cycle campaigning to leave the “bike bubble” (2017/01/08) behind was worth taking. Campaigning to prioritize urban design now opened up political debates about cycling’s worth to society. Holding back this shift was another, older style of campaigning.

My sincere wish was to become more collective in our view and ‘to move the debate on’ (2015/10/03). What I wanted to talk about, and leave behind us, was our own internal navel-gazing debate. I strongly advocated that we, as cycle campaigners, needed to speak out about road conditions more inclusively and acknowledge the difficulties so that “it becomes totally acceptable to say: ‘Cycling? Under current conditions I am scared (for my children) and I want functional cycling infrastructure’” (2015/01/17).

In activism, bringing collective grievances to power holders’ attention was a vital activity. Lobbying was vital. Speaking truth to power took coordination. I knew from my own experience that people did not simply wake up one morning as an activist. It took a person to progress up “stages of activation” (2016/07/23) before finding their full place in the local campaigning scene (if, sadly, not already existing before). The campaigning scene was unstable due to the lack of a collectively-felt message.

In my blog I would specifically make the distinction between two activist types: community organizers who grow and nurture the campaign from within, and political activists who work outwardly on the aspects of political change. There was a balance to be struck because activism needs community organizers too: looking after volunteers, coordinating action (in agreement with the political wing of the campaign). I strongly felt that growing and stabilizing a cycle campaign would hinge on “harnessing and corralling cycling’s diversity [...] In a way you have to keep your eyes on the horizon, to see the sunrise” (2015/01/17). Campaigning is a collective effort made up of a multitude of forces, using individuals’ strengths to combine to a greater force.

[KL] I observed that cycle campaigning was often aimless and ineffective (not just where I was in Tyneside and Newcastle). What was striking were new the initiatives especially those emerging in the USA (as described above), where the dominance of vehicular cycling as a basis

for thinking about both infrastructure and policy was being fundamentally challenged. There, the cycle campaigning scene was beginning to address political issues, I wrote: “I am inspired by what the US advocacy does. It gets on with it (Bike League for example) – searching out data and turning it into narratives and finding partners and finding uncompromised ways of working together” (2015/10/03).

By 2016, I thankfully noted, that there had been a conspicuous shift in cycle campaigning in the UK too, especially compared to the early 2010s when I began my campaigning. National campaigning by the *Cycling Embassy of Great Britain* and the *London Cycling Campaign* had increasingly been successful in bringing the common good to the fore so that cycle campaigning “with its more recent (and long overdue and very welcome) focus on the environment and urban design, positions itself clearly” (2016/10/16). As mentioned above, recent institutional changes confirm the general direction of travel of shifting campaign focus.

Cycle-specific infrastructure, protected cycleways, started to be on the cycle campaign agenda nationally, and the message was taken up by the political system too. In a debate about urban design and its purpose I saw the spatial battle gain broad support. I noted: “If your campaign aim is one of common good, as building cycleways is, you are on the right track [to] win over people, silently supportive or newly informed” (2016/04/15).

3.2.2 Interviews: new conversing with old

Yet there were battles and skirmishes on the ground. Interviewing the women activists, many recalled the conversations with the vehicular cycling proponent to be tough and challenging. The vehicular-cycling activist did rarely compromise or agreed to disagree, to the extent that the vehicular-cyclist movement is “almost fascistic” in their demeanor (D5). For example, this interviewee described being ignored when speaking to fellow, but vehicular, cyclists: “I felt frustrated, or I think I was probably getting a little bit bored of being the one trying to generate some discussions and some debates [amongst current cyclists] and being quite isolated” (UK1).

Despite these feelings of isolation, the women activists expressed a strong desire for their views to be heard, often grounding their arguments in urban design. For example, this interviewee demanded: “I should be listened to as well [because] if I feel unsafe, you're not going to get me out there” (D2).

Frequently the verbal interactions, often jousting and aggressive, did not make good common sense to the interviewees. Inside their own campaigning circles many interviewees had experienced this tension between seasoned and newcomer campaigners. This interviewee recalled: VC [vehicular cycling proponents] find it hard to admit that this is a totally new viewpoint for them, a viewpoint they have never been confronted with. (D5)

Defensiveness, incomplete listening, and lack of empathy in communication was an issue for the women activists.

I asked questions and sometimes I get a defense, and like I'm not looking for defense. I'm just trying to understand. It's like explaining I'm not understanding something, explain so that I can understand, not, don't defend don't tell me why it's good, explain it to me [laughs] but yeah. (D2)

Some interviewees also hoped for better ways of managing disagreements. For example, this interviewee hoped it was more common "agreeing to disagree with vehicular cyclists, we are political opponents [with different viewpoints] - and that is perfectly ok" (D5). For instance, this interviewee found it necessary to explain to her conversation partner that "I understand [your argument], I just have a different opinion" (D2).

Disrupting the prevailing communication patterns (in cycle campaigning) also came at the price of feeling excluded, as some interviewees highlighted. Beyond cycle campaigning, outspoken women in society were routinely penalized for speaking out, "yes, you get told off, again and again" recalled D5, when exploring gender communication issues. Both UK and German women experienced this communicational rift.

3.2.3 Reflections: power, space, gender

[KL] Campaigning for cycleways, that is, for spatial justice, started in the UK and Germany in the early 2010s. I was one such campaigner. The women I spoke to were key advocates in the field. We experienced the "vehicular cyclist" as a kind of cycle campaigner difficult to commune and converse with, aggressive in their style, territorial and narrow in the conception of the cyclist identity, and exclusive in their campaigning goal. The women had tried to understand the logic of the "vehicular cyclist". After a while they concluded that their own needs and lived realities were of a different nature, contradictory to the "vehicular cyclist" idea. Further, we women campaigners claimed that their campaigning aim, cycleways, would lead to common good: it would benefit not just us, rather it would support a new, slower kind of cycling style altogether, one that would broaden cycling's allure.

Personally, I had been wondering about the cycling constituent in relation to cycle campaigning and realized that being a cyclist does not automatically make you a natural or effective campaigner for space for cycling and alterations in urban design. At the time this was a devastating realization, I felt that solidarity was betrayed. It was when I was looking outward, speaking to fellow women campaigners, that there was an entity, the "vehicular cyclist" who was antithetical to our spatial campaigning. This type of cyclist was identity driven and had constructed an ideology of the strong and fit cyclist that everyone ought to look up to and aspire to, if needed with training. In my research and campaigning, I began to realize that the typical cycle campaigner in Germany and the UK had been the vehicular cyclist. But this was beginning to change thanks to the new spatial justice campaigning I, inadvertently, was part of. The lobbying for space carried fruits, as it pricked political ears, whilst vehicular cycling had aided the persistence of hegemonic automobility.

[PC] Comparing these insights with the lists of presentations I have attended and read at over 15 years of successive Velo-City conferences (an international conference series for advocates and professionals) it is really clear that these observations are part of a wider shift. Concern with broader issues of spatial justice and mobility Jus-tice (Sheller 2018), not just the rights of cyclists, has moved gradually from being a minority to a majority concern over the decade from 2006. The explicit naming of an agenda of bicycle justice (Golub et al 2016) in the academic literature comes emerges as a response to the concerns and perspectives of activists (for example, Blue, 2012; 2015 and Lugo, 2018). Of course, we also need to recognize that many cycling researchers become academics to deliberately and consciously take up and further their understanding of causes with which they're already involved. It's a far from even progression, but what is notable is how much of this is driven by a gender shift in the discussion. But I'm still surprised that while women and cycling has commendably become a major issue of study, a lot of it is still in the language of inclusion, not challenging the foundational masculinities. There seems to be a link between masculinities and (vehicular) cycling that is clearly exposed in your interviews, but invisible to other campaigners. These deeper issues rarely appear in European academic analyses although they are to be found much more frequently elsewhere (Lemos et al 2016; Harkot, 2018)

[KL] The women campaigners I spoke to had a hunch, that what they experienced had something to do with the wider sense of being a woman in a man's world, was touching on concepts like feminism, masculinities and cultural norms. Yet none of us could grasp it in its entirety. The totality of what was happening remained rather allusive to us. At the time, we lacked the words to really nail down and name our experiences. We were campaigning for spatial changes and came up against the fogginess of vehicular cycling, with its liberal and identity-based minority needs, expressed as the authority on cycling. Yes, much of it has to do with masculine-connoted behavior of aggressively defending territory with underlying needs and emotional states remaining unreflected. This conversation has been of much help to me in clarifying what was happening to us, as women campaigners, at the time.

4. Discussion/Conclusion

These discussions capture important moments in time as activist communities struggle to make sense of circumstances that appear to be both rapidly changing and simultaneously mired in inaction, or at best a recalcitrance to embrace change. Change does not happen evenly or consistently, and individual people, with their own histories and involvements, continue to be important as both motors for, and brakes upon change. The vehicular paradigm, as Tom Babin writes from his perspective as a US activist, is dead, in principle at least, as the way to encourage and support more people to cycle (Babin 2016). Yet the reality of transport cycling requires riders to continue to ride in traffic and so provisions for 'sharing' the road remain essential. Hence arguments over where people cycle and how they should cycle in those spaces will not disappear. The snapshots of the discussions presented here reveal however, that these contentions are much, much more than straightforward disagreements over tactics. Rather,

they exposes the way in which strategies and preferences are embedded in more ontological concerns: the kind of people we desire to be and the kinds of realities we inhabit. They are about gendered roles and identities. So, an important part of that discussion concerns the social relations and relationships that we wish to foster.

Reflecting on the politics of knowledge, Weeks (1998) observes the importance of standpoint in knowledge creation. Importantly, however she takes a distinctive line, eschewing narratives that pursue feminist standpoint for its potential (though controversial) capacity for epistemological privilege. Instead, she writes:

“this is what I find the most promising and timely contribution of standpoint theory ... that a feminist standpoint is more powerful as an ontological project dedicated to the construction of antagonistic subject with dreams, passions and interests at odds with the existing order of things, subject with the will and capacity to seek alternatives.” (Weeks 1998, 9-10.)

Following this line, our reflections on the discourses outlined above are interested in the ways in which diverse subjectivities are formed within cycling activisms.

Aldred (2010) usefully outlines a number of narratives of cycling citizenship constructed by the circumstances of riding in hostile environment. Importantly, she points out that the relation between context, practice and subjectivity is not homogenous, that similar situations can provoke different responses. Behrsin and Benner (2017) use a political ecology framework to highlight the importance of environmental subjectivities, but they also note that these should not be understood in any determinist manner. Instead, they need also to pay “close attention to the circulations and transformations of power, capital, and labor, in addition to materials” (Behrsin and Banner 2017: 102). The same environmental conditions of riding, and the same interactions occur across the spectrum of activists discussed above. However, the divides revealed in the discourses show the central importance of other dimensions of social and collective identities.

Gender does matter, but again, not in a specifically determinant way. The gendered perspectives are not reflections caused by biological sex, but from the social roles a responsibilities and identities forged in a gendered society. Predominantly older, male advocates, the ‘beards’ and ‘blazers’ have other forms of social capital to call on in order to help them traverse and overcome contested terrains. Without the same resources, the newer voices are forced to make a more wide-ranging analysis of the inequalities. They make implicit connections between multiple forms and experiences of exclusion and domination. Thus, what emerges from their analysis of the situation, is that spatial injustices and hierarchies of power experienced in the performances of everyday cycling cannot be separated from other experiences of injustice and other hierarchies of power.

This analysis aligns with Bacchi and Bonham’s (2017) approach, which similarly to our narrative reflections, understands the interview as more than a realist tool for revealing particular realities. Further work from the same authors (Bonham et al., 2015) exposes how the gendering

of cycling roles extends into the gendering of spaces and objects. This is not simply the obvious (sexist) design and marketing of particular bikes as 'suitable for women' but the legitimation and de-legitimation of particular ways of seeing and experiencing the world. What counts as pertinent or valid knowledge in the processes of re-envisioning the urban environment are vital questions for planning and intervention (Lemos et al 2016).

Returning to Fainstein (2010; 2014), we need recall her insistence that urban intervention should be normative. Indeed, interventions that shape and alter the ways people live are inevitably normative: the pretense that they are not, is an exercise of very specific power, one designed to reinforce existing social norms and practices (Cox and Koglin, 2020). The voices of the women activists presented here intuitively reconstructed the problem of urban cycling as a problem of spatial justice. They campaigned for cycleways in their respective cities and asked for the construction of cycleways. In these cycleways, away from fast, foul, endangering motor traffic, they saw the common good for a slower, more temperate, and relaxed kind of cycling. Vehicular cyclists' campaign for raising the profile of the cyclist identity, this leaves the spatial aspect untouched. The "cyclist" as an identity becomes disconnected from the complex interweaving of multiple identities and roles, and thus impoverishes any movement towards mobility justice (Sheller 2018) even while campaigning for greater recognition of rights. The women campaigners given voice here recognized that their campaigning for spatial change was also political: they came up against the old style of identity campaigning as well as up against politicians and practitioners. The vehicular-cycling message was not asking for radical (spatial) change, rather, it remained liberal in nature. It stayed within a paradigm dictated by automobilities and hence was ultimately less politically stirring (Cox, in press). The women's claim for space was political, especially it was about annexing space from the automobile territory. The women were political campaigners as well as community organizers. Their clear message, space for all to cycle comfortably, was heard politically.

Research on social movement activism has been traditionally dominated by organizational studies. An unforeseen consequence of this has been that activism can often be interpreted in a rather utilitarian fashion, implicitly revolving around the question of "how effective is any given course of action or protest likely to achieve a predetermined goal". This means that the ontological bases of social concern are overlooked, in that basic human psychological needs are suppressed. To put this another way, to take action for social change within the context of a radically altered world view, from the activist perspective is not simply to achieve a single goal. Rather, as Finn Mackay (2015: 6) describes in relation to feminist actions to reclaim the streets, the ultimate goal is far beyond any single change: "a movement for change ... [is] not working for a world unchanged apart from the leadership. ...it is about a different type of world altogether". Radical social justice is irreducible to single issues and not amenable to reform or addressed through the reassertion of particular identities. Trusting their own experiences, those we worked with came to their own radical analyses by connecting experiences otherwise disconnected in the world of single-issue analysis and problem-solving solutionism. The women campaigners saw themselves as part of a wider socio-political structure and social networks in which they acted in complex ways to formulate narratives about socio-spatial justice. They dared to aim for a different world, just as in Kern's *Feminist City* where: "world making means

the process of both imagining and creating space(s) where things can unfold otherwise” (Kern 2020: 57).

The women activists employed their communication skills and gave their campaigning opponent, the vehicular cyclist, much consideration. In conversing with them, however, they concluded that the aggressive style was excluding their own realities. Aggression made it nearly impossible to be heard, understood or included by the cyclist identitarian. Leyendecker observed much patience by her fellow campaigners to find agreements, foster compromises or derive adversarial understandings with the old campaigner. Yet the vehicular cyclist was rigid in their belief “cycling is safer on the road” and fixed on the enhancement of the cyclist identity, not on justice in space and road design.

Justice is a dialectic, obtained through participation and articulation, it changes with time. The women campaigners linked their interpretation of the Just City to attaining a common good, for people who cycle, who want to cycle, and, with better infrastructural provision, who may cycle in the future. The vehicular cyclist requested justice mainly for themselves, for an exclusive and exclusionary cycling. Thus, we will have to continue to be critical, vigilant even, and keep asking questions when assessing social groupings: justice for whom and at what price? Where do the structural and systemic injustices lie? Who benefits from these imbalances in power? In the case of cycleway campaigning, these answers are to be found in the spatial apportionment of the city away from the car, the intrinsic social good of cycling and the value of communal slow (non-automobile) spaces for affirmative citizen exchange and participation in public life.

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