



ARTICLE FROM THE BOOK:

Cyclists & Cycling Around the World – Creating Liveable and Bikeable Cities

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Branding Cycling - Mainstreaming A Good Thing

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We are standing at a crossroads in the history of our cities. Nothing less. The rise in focus on re-establishing *liveable cities* continued unabated the past decade, with no peak in sight. I regard this as A Good Thing. At the forefront of this new movement is something as simple as The Bicycle, quite simply the most effective tool in our urban toolboxes for making our cities nicer places to live. The bicycle as a symbol of change is a powerful one.

Afternoon bicycle traffic in Copenhagen, Denmark. A Good Thing.
Photo: Copenhagenize.eu





Human streets should not be engineered like sewers.
Photo: Copenhagenize.eu

Cities around the world are now considering how they can replant the bicycle as transport on the urban landscape. There is a tendency to regard the bicycle as a transport solution (I refuse to call it a transport *alternative*) and place it in the same category as other transport forms. It is, of course, a transport form but leaving bicycle transport and infrastructure up to traffic engineers is unwise and quite useless.

For the better part of 85 years, traffic engineers and planners have failed miserably at tackling the traffic challenges presented by automobiles. They often regard traffic as a code to be cracked. A myriad of data and maps. Not as human behavioural patterns and desire lines. Unfortunately, the reigning school of thought is unchanged since the 1920s. It's easy to blame politicians for inaction and lack of vision regarding life in our cities and the widescale destruction of urban centres around the world. A destruction that has gone completely unchecked by policymakers and society at large. It is, however, more appropriate to look to the root of the problem.

Andrés Duany, the American architect and urban planner, sums it up quite nicely, however. "The problem with planning is that it has been overtaken by mathematical models - traffic, density, impact assessment, public costs etc. - discarding common sense and empirical observation". Unfortunately, this has been the case since engineers were first handed the job of engineering traffic in the early years of the twentieth century.

For 7000 years, streets in cities were human spaces used for transport, gathering, communication and as a playground for children - an extension of peoples' front rooms.



Cycle tracks run parallel to motorways leading to Copenhagen.
Photo: Copenhagenize.eu

In two short decades in the early 1900s, that perception changed radically and streets became regarded as public utilities like sewers and electricity.

Allowing bicycle culture to blossom and bicycles as transport to once again fill the streets and cycle tracks is not achievable with the traffic engineering mindset that has dominated the past eight decades. Bicycle transport requires an understanding of anthropology, sociology, behaviour and design.

Copenhagnize Consulting's *Four Goals for Promoting Urban Cycling* are a template for cities to follow if they wish to increase levels of bicycle traffic. These four goals are simple but the fact that they are received as "interesting" is a sign that we have been overcomplicating cycling for far too long.

"A2Bism" is the primary goal. If you make the bicycle the quickest way to get around a city, the strangest people will be seen doing it. Homo sapiens are like rivers – they will



Much modern traffic engineering is not about creating space for cycling but rather ignoring a lot of space that could be used for cycle tracks.
Photo: Copenhagenize.eu

always find the quickest route. This presupposes safe, dedicated infrastructure of course, but it's the simplest way to start thinking. Think bicycle first.

Then there is taming what we call The Bull in Society's China Shop. The destructive capability of the automobile must be restricted through traffic calming measures and lower speed limits in order to save lives and encourage cycling and public transport.

The redemocratisation of urban cycling is on the list of goals as well. Giving the bicycle back to the common citizen, for whom it was invented in the first place. Sub-cultures, in many regions, "own" cycling but the goal is to make the bicycle a normal, accepted and respected transport form for everyone else. The 99%, if you like.

The fourth goal is what this essay is about: marketing and branding, selling urban cycling like we sell any other product and using mainstream marketing techniques to encourage urban cycling. The philosophy that urban cycling is a product like any other and should be sold using basic and timeless marketing principles seems simple but it simply isn't being done enough. It is often either misunderstood or ignored by the majority of people working with promoting cycling.

It certainly presents a challenge, given the fact that an entire generation in many parts of the world have been force-fed the marketing perception that cycling is just a sport or recreation. There is, however, a great deal of historical experience to be used as inspiration.

For the first 60 years of the bicycle it was a rational, practical approach that pushed it forward by providing infrastructure - classic A2Bism all over the world, not least in Copenhagen. Infrastructure that followed the desire lines of the cycling citizenry made



Cycle Chic Breakfast event in Barcelona, in collaboration with cycling NGO Bicicleta Club de Catalunya (BACC). Celebrating the cycling citizens of the city with breakfast and a Cycle Chic photoshoot. Rolling out the red carpet for Barcelona's bicycle users.

the bicycle into an accepted and respected transport form. Today we have the added challenge of re-branding cycling as a normal transport form for Citizen Cyclists and this requires a different focus.

I have often said that if we relieved 80% of the world's bicycle advocates from their duties and replaced them with compact teams of recent marketing graduates we would triple the modal share for urban cycling in three years.

A bold statement perhaps, but let's have a look at where a great deal of cycling promotion comes from. Most modern bicycle advocacy began in the 1970s, when many nations were adversely affected by the two energy crises and the desire for societal change in the late 1960s had not yet faded. The bicycle was at the forefront of the symbolism of those heady times and became trendy for a few years.

When the energy crises passed however, the bicycle was relegated to a piece of sports equipment or something you used for recreation. The advocacy groups that formed in the 1970s may have survived but most have been stuck in the mindset of the 1970s, using the same messaging as environmentalism. Focusing on "It's healthy! It's good for the environment!" instead of highlighting the fact that the bicycle is an effective transport tool. The bicycle industry gave up too, concentrating instead on producing and selling bicycles (and a wide array of highly profitable accessories) to the hobby crowd.

If you consider the fact that environmentalism is the greatest flop in the history of marketing, you can see that we have to think differently. Forty years of environmentalism has not brought us an entire generation of environmentally-conscious citizens - just an entire generation of citizens who are tired of sanctimonious messaging from environmentalists.

When sub-cultures try to market themselves and their hobby/philosophy/way of thinking, it rarely reaches a mainstream audience. And yet, regarding urban cycling, it is the mainstream demographic that we should be interested in reaching. The "avid cyclists" already ride and will continue to do so. You get the feeling that they are keen to try and get a whole bunch of people to be just like them. Imagine if speed walkers did all the advocacy for pedestrianism.

Unfortunately for the sub-cultures, most people don't want to be just like them. Regular citizens would like to be able to merely ride a bicycle to work or around their neighbourhood if given the chance.



The goal now - more than ever - is mainstreaming our marketing and branding of urban cycling as transport, making it normal again - a lifestyle necessity as it used to be in cities and towns around the world for decades and as it is in cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam but also as it is becoming in many other cities. I often highlight Barcelona, Seville, Dublin, Budapest and Paris. They are the poster children of Emerging Bicycle Cities. There were no bicycles left in these cities in 2006. No sub-cultures to speak of, no one riding at all.

Now, they have all proved that infrastructure combined with logical, practical marketing, works. All use positive imagery in municipal campaigns featuring no-nonsense photos of Citizen Cyclists getting on with their day on bicycles. Material that provides a societal mirror in which all the citizens can see themselves reflected. Practical bicycles are featured, with baskets, back racks, fenders and chainguards or the respective cities' bike share programme bicycles. The message is clear. "This could be you. All you need is a bicycle."

The success of Cycle Chic® is also an excellent example of marketing to a mainstream. It has gone from being a blog featuring photos from the streets of Copenhagen to being called Bicycle Advocacy 2.0. It is free from tired, sub-cultural messaging and it has appealed to regular citizens around the world since 2006.

Copenhagenize Consulting has held Cycle Chic events in many countries over the past five years. From fashion shows in collaboration with the municipalities of Dublin, Barcelona and Kensington & Chelsea to parties, photo shoots and cycle chic rides in cities like Mexico City, Helsinki, Moscow, Vancouver and Tokyo.



Focusing on celebrating those regular citizens who choose to ride in their cities. Something that the overly-protective sub-cultures and "avid cyclists" fail to do.

We are in the midst of a positive age where the bicycle is back and going strong. There are still challenges ahead. Are we faced with an impossible task? I think not.

When the Safety bicycle – the design we still use today – was invented in the 1880s, it brought with it the greatest social revolution the world had yet seen. It transformed human society more quickly, effectively and positively than any other invention in history. The invention itself was brilliant but what took the bicycle as an agent of change to the next level was the marketing of it.

Look at the vast array of posters for bicycle brands and accessories that graced the world between the 1880s and the 1950s. Mainstream marketing at its finest. Images showing cycling as elegant, attractive, effortless and enjoyable. Images featuring women – in order to underline the ease of bicycle use but also to sell bicycles to women and men.





It's interesting to compare the marketing of Raleigh bicycles in various countries. The catalogues change each year, but there is still a clear difference between the way they market their bicycles in Denmark and other markets like the UK or the USA. On the Danish site the bicycles are largely upright models in a city setting and they often feature Citizen Cyclists using them in practical ways. On the UK and US sites the images that greet you are adrenaline-driven hobby cyclists roaring down mountains or along country roads decked out in all manner of gear, leaning over their handlebars to go even faster.

Here we have two totally different marketing directions. If we want to encourage regular citizens to make the bicycle part of their daily lives, look to the Danish site. If we wish to perpetuate the myth that bicycles are merely pieces of sports equipment for hobbyists and recreational activities, look to the UK or the US.

Marketing cycling for the mainstream has worked before and will work again if basic marketing principles are adhered to. The bicycle industry has an ocean of products they wish to sell you but the 99% don't need them. All they need is a bicycle.

Successful branding requires a so-called Stickiness Factor. The creation of a social epidemic. The writer Malcolm Gladwell says in his book "Tipping Point" that, "ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread like viruses do" and that "the success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and

rare set of social gifts. " Gladwell continues, saying that, "Epidemics are sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which they occur."

It's occurring now. The conditions and circumstances for a bicycle virus are perfect. The time and place is now and here. It is of the utmost importance that we recognize this and do everything in our power to allow this virus to spread by using marketing and branding techniques as old as homo sapiens themselves.

Let us leap elegantly over the tired and sub-cultural marketing and messaging of the bicycle industry and bicycle advocates and go for gold by selling this future commodity to the citizens of our cities. Let us pull out all the stops in messaging correctly and positively.

I think this would be A Good Thing.

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