



ARTICLE FROM THE BOOK:

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

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Further Development of Cycle Culture - Amsterdam continues to pave the way for cyclists

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There is almost no city in the world where people cycle as much as in Amsterdam. The Amsterdam inhabitants cycle to work in the morning, they take their children to school on bicycles and do their shopping on bicycles. For the residents of Amsterdam cycling is an ordinary, everyday affair. Everywhere in the world, other cities see Amsterdam as a good example of how a city can be both mobile and pleasant to live in. What did Amsterdam's city council do to reach this point? Which factors contributed to make Amsterdam the number one cycling city? The answers are given in this article.

Amsterdam, the cycling capital: a short introduction

Amsterdam has a population of 780,000, whereas there are over 2.2 million inhabitants in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. Almost half of all trips (up to 7.5 km) in Amsterdam are made by bicycle. This means that every day the cyclists cycle 2 million km.

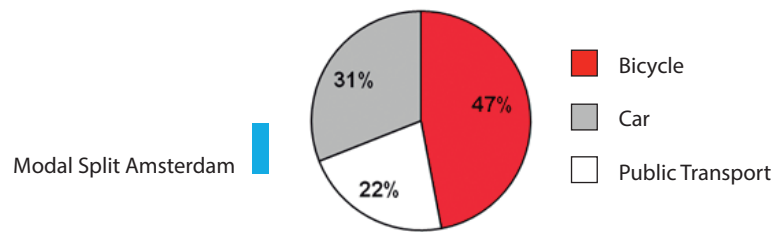
Cyclists in Amsterdam are 50% female and 50% male. Of the cyclists, 40% are between 30 – 44 years old, 70% have a higher education and 75% have an average to high income. Please note: most inhabitants are 30-44 years old and have a higher education. So these numbers have to be seen in that context.

You can find more facts and figures about the bicycle in Amsterdam in the text under the pictures in this article. The pictures in this article also show how Amsterdam looks as a cycling city.



Amsterdam's residents cycle
2 million km every day.

Modal Split



Success factors for growth of bicycle use

The success of the bicycle in Amsterdam is due to several factors.

1. Historic structure of Amsterdam makes cycling attractive

Amsterdam was made for horses and carriages and that seems also to be the perfect scale for cyclists. It has a very compact city centre with narrow streets, a lot of canals and narrow bridges. The city centre has many facilities and amenities within a short distances of each other. Moreover, Amsterdam is flat and has a mild climate in summer and winter like the rest of the Netherlands. All these factors make cycling agreeable.

The historic structure makes a large part of the city unsuitable for large traffic flows. Many streets offer insufficient space for parking cars. This is another reason to use the scarce space as efficiently as possible. The bicycle fits perfectly here because, compared to the car, it needs relatively little space, both when moving and when parked.



Amsterdam paves the way for cyclists: there are 500 km separated bicycle lanes, which are safe, comfortable and fast.



Bicycle parking on bridge railings

Change in the 1970s: from cars to bicycles and public transport

Plans from the 1960s to realise major breakthroughs in the old city for the benefit of the strongly growing car traffic have been rarely implemented. Early 1970s increased the resistance to such plans. Residents protested because their homes had to be broken down. Others stood up for the preservation of the cultural-historic value of the monumental city. Simultaneously the environmental movement was gaining momentum. This protested strongly against the effects of the overwhelming growth of car traffic, which was affecting the quality of life, green environment and traffic safety. They regarded the bicycle as a good alternative to the car.

At the end of 1970s, a new generation of young politicians in the city council took over these ideas. They laid the basis for a different traffic and transport policy, aimed at making and keeping the city accessible, liveable, traffic safe and healthy. From that moment on, the use of public transport and bicycles was stimulated and the use of cars discouraged. That has remained the case to the present day.

Cyclists in the historic city centre of Amsterdam.



2. Political choice of the city council for the cyclist is essential

The aims of the traffic and transport policy are – in short - to keep the city of Amsterdam accessible, liveable, traffic safe and healthy. To reach these aims an integral policy has been developed, stimulating the use of public transport and bicycles and discouraging the use of cars.

Traffic safety is priority number one for the city council of Amsterdam. Therefore it is an essential part of the bicycle policy. Since the end of the 1970s safe, separated bicycle lanes, separated from car traffic, have been built. To be able to realise this not only has the number of parking spaces on the street been reduced but also the growth of car traffic has been stopped. The introduction of paid parking in 1990 was a very effective instrument:

- parking for visitors in the city centre nowadays costs € 5 per hour;
- residents need a paid permit to park their car on the street. At this moment, there is a waiting list of four years in the historic city.

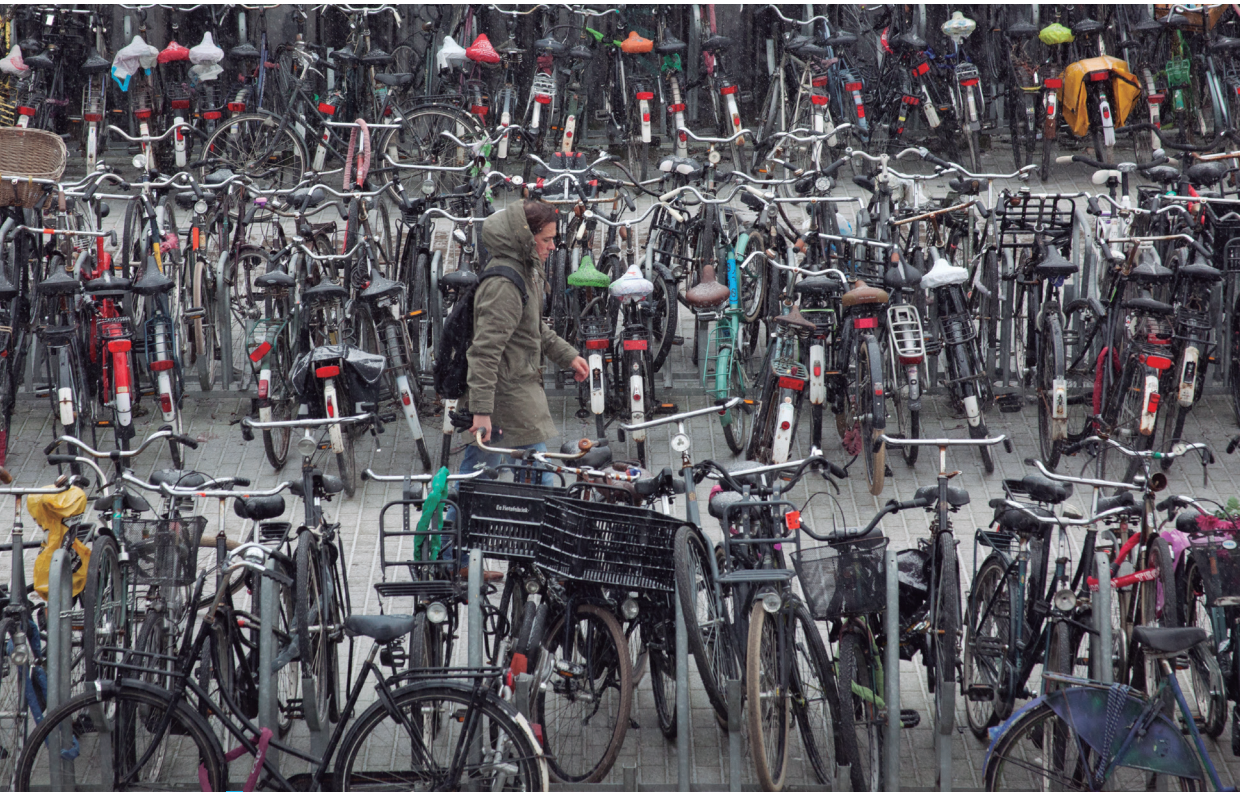
Since 1990, car use in the city has decreased by 25%, while bicycle use has increased by almost 30%. The car has been replaced by the bicycle. Choosing in favour of the bicycle means that the car has to make way for the bicycle. To take these measures requires political willingness and courage, because less space for cars is also politically sensitive in Amsterdam.

3. Cycling contributes significantly to achieving the aims of the traffic and transport policy

The bicycle policy is an essential part of the traffic and transport policy, because it contributes significantly to achieving the policy objectives. The population and especially the number of jobs in Amsterdam over the past 25-30 years have been growing considerably. So, mobility over long distances has also increased proportionally. Due to the growth of cycling, the traffic in the city does not get stuck and the city remains liveable. Outside the city, public transport should absorb the growth of traffic. But many commuters cycle to the railroad station over the short distance and take the train to their job over the long distance. The last 10 years, this kind of commuting by bicycle and train has increased from 10% to 50%.

Bicycle as pack mule





There are 650,000 – 700,000 bicycles in Amsterdam.
75% of Amsterdam's residents (over the age of 12 years old) own one or more bicycles

The municipality has adopted an active and integral bicycle policy, which currently comprises the following components:

- Traffic safety
- Bicycle network all over the city
- Bicycle parking facilities in the city and at railroad stations
- Traffic education and bicycle exams at primary school
- Campaigns and communication.

The city council considers all these components important for stimulating bicycle traffic. The municipality started the bicycle policy at the end of the 1970s with traffic safety and bicycle infrastructure. Later on, Amsterdam developed a policy for bicycle parking (including prevention of bicycle theft), education and promotion of bicycle use. In this way the bicycle policy has been developed into the integral policy it is today. New

developments require new responses. That is important in every policy field, also for bicycle policy. This is necessary to continue encouraging the use of the bicycles.

4. Structural and continuous investments in bicycle facilities are necessary

Making a choice in favour of the cyclists not only requires political courage, but also structural focus on the bicycle. The 'bicycle' must be included in all new traffic and transport projects and new spatial developments. Structural and continuous investments are needed for this, not only for the realisation and construction of new infrastructure (bicycle paths, parking facilities), but also for proper management and maintenance. Realisation of one or two bicycle projects would not solve this problem. During the last decade, Amsterdam has invested structurally in bicycle facilities, but even we must continue to invest in new facilities for continuing to stimulate bicycle traffic.

Traffic education: Bicycle exam for children of 11 - 12 years old.



Bicycle Network Amsterdam: routes should be fast, traffic safe, comfortable and secure. Bicycle lanes are laid in red asphalt.

5. Left and right wing politicians acknowledge the importance of cycling

Cycling has many advantages in various fields, politicians from left to right endorse the importance of cycling. The bike is a fast and flexible means of transport over short distances (up to 7.5 km) and thus keeps the city accessible, liveable, safe, clean and healthy. Cycling is a local solution to a global problems. It improves the quality of life, because it produces zero emission and it is silent.

Cycling keeps people healthy. Daily cycling to work, school and shops reduces the risk of obesity and makes the gym redundant. People who cycle daily, have less stress, less illness, live longer and remain healthy longer. Absenteeism from work among cyclists is lower than among non-cyclists. And cyclists cost society less with regard to health expenses. It also contributes to overall fitness and personal wellbeing.

Furthermore a bike requires less space compared to a car. Ten to twelve bicycles can be parked in the same space as one parked car takes.

Cycling is cheap, because a bicycle is not expensive to purchase and to maintain. And cycling facilities are relatively inexpensive compared to the requirements for car and public transport. So investing in the bike is attractive to politicians.



Bicycle parking: increase of bicycle use requires investments.

In the 'boxbike' to school



6. Role of Dutch Cyclists Union and advocacy groups

The Amsterdam branch of the Dutch Cyclists Union (DCU) is continuously campaigning for better cycling conditions in Amsterdam. From the start of the new bicycle policy, in the late 1970s, the DCU has been involved in the development and implementation of urban cycling policy. Partly due to this Union and to other advocacy groups the new generation of politicians was inspired to change to a different policy: the bicycle in the city was considered as a good alternative to the car. Through its extensive network of volunteers the Cyclists Union still maintains its role as 'eyes and ears of the city'. The DCU advises the city council on all kinds of traffic and transport plans (like construction and reconstruction of roads). From the perspective of cyclists they evaluate those plans for road safety and flow of cyclists. They also advise on the adjustment of traffic lights for cyclists and give input to plans for major new urban projects. The council is committed to the discretion of the DCU. Sometimes there are differences in opinion between the municipality and the DCU, leading to discussion. But, by using the expertise and opinions of the DCU, the city council increases support for the bicycle policy.

The municipality also involves residents, businesses and civil society organizations in the planning process. The city council considers it important to be informed about their needs, experiences and ideas, in order to improve the plans and to get the widest possible support. Of course, it is the responsibility of the municipality to make a good balance of all interests.

Parked bicycles: 225,000 parking facilities in public space and 13,000 parking spaces in guarded bicycle garages in Amsterdam.



Priority for cyclists



Traffic safety: designated area for cyclists where trucks can see them well.



Learn to ride a bike.

7. Dutch bicycle culture

Bicycles are very Dutch. They are a part of the Dutch culture. In the Netherlands, one cycles almost daily. Amsterdam is not different. At the age of 3-4 years children learn to cycle. People from all classes cycle. It is part of everyday life. The bike is no 'poor man's vehicle'. Highly educated people use bikes even more. Inhabitants with a non-Dutch background do not cycle much. It is a challenge for Amsterdam to let them experience how fast, funny and healthy cycling can be.

8. Cycling is more than transport

The bike is a social vehicle. On the bike you are part of the city, you are approachable, easy to get in contact with, you are not disconnected from the life around you; you are not trapped in your own car. A bike is more than a vehicle. Cycling gives you a sense of freedom and joy. It makes living in a city enjoyable. Cycling is part of life in the city.

Cycling brightens
up Amsterdam.



■ Amsterdam loves bikes

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