

How policy documents (re)produce the cycling citizen

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Cycling is often promoted as a low cost, accessible and virtuous solution to many urban transport problems, including air pollution and congestion. It is also pedalled as a strategy for solving public health issues created by modern urban living, such as the constructed crisis of the 'obesity epidemic', and a way to address the looming threat of climate change. Thus cycling is heralded as a sustainable mobility capable of addressing a range of social, environmental, economic and personal issues. Yet the status of cycling as a quick and easy transport solution to these ills has rarely been problematised. Much of the academic and policy literature exploring the adoption or rejection of cycling as a personal mode of transport has focussed on the role of the quality and availability of physical infrastructure, perceptions of traffic and hazards, and local urban form and streetscape. This emphasis has also dominated transport planning and policy efforts to increase cycling mode share. While these factors are undeniably important influences in individual travel behaviour and decisions, the social, psychological, cultural and contextual factors that influence cycling behaviour and modal choice have been less well explored.

In countries like Australia where cycling remains a very low proportion of total trips by mode, the 'cyclist' has become an identity in and of itself; an identity that sits more comfortably and consistently with some than others, in turn shaping travel practices and choices. This research explores the limited and limiting ways in which the cycling citizen is reflected in, and indeed constructed by, transport policy and planning documents, and how this may shape decisions to (or not to) cycle.

Following Steinbach et al. (2011), we understand cycling as a matter of justice, and position modal choice as a decision influenced by intersectional factors such as gender, class, ethnicity, caring responsibilities and body shape. These are rarely

reflected in, or addressed by, policy and planning documents. Drawing from the right to the city (Harvey 2003; Marcuse 2009) concept and the just cities movement (Fainstein 2010; Marcuse et al. 2009) we consider how the accessibility and adoption of sustainable mobilities—like cycling—are affected by identity and social positioning. These constructs also provide a lens for identifying the ways transport policies aimed at increasing the uptake of certain modes of transport may have unintended repercussions for, and exacerbate the marginality of certain groups. In particular we consider the ways that the prevailing images and discourses of cycling may work to further discourage the participation of already underrepresented groups (Aldred et al. 2015).

In order to understand the ways cycling and cyclists have been advanced in public policy we undertook an interpretive policy analysis (Yanow 2000) of key government policy documents focussing on cycling in Brisbane, Australia. This process involved analysing the written text and visual and symbolic rhetorical devices such as photographs, icons, and other graphical representations in publicly available policy documents to understand the meanings embedded in the prevailing policy framework within this jurisdiction. Considering the visual aspects of policy, in particular, helped to construct the beneficiaries of cycling policy interventions by highlighting who is included (and how), and who is rendered absent in the promotion of sustainable mobilities.

Following Yanow (2000), we undertook a three step process of interpretive policy analysis. We commenced by collating the current key policy and planning documents governing cycling in Brisbane from both state and local government agencies. We then identified the discursive themes, conflicts, and concepts in these documents. Finally, we explored the implications of these meanings in the construction of the cycling citizen through the just cities framework and explored how transport policies aimed at increasing the uptake of sustainable modes of transport may have unintended repercussions for, and exacerbate the marginality of certain groups.

Cycling was overwhelmingly positioned in the policy documents analysed as a healthy and sustainable *choice* people can make. This choice narrative denies the structural and cultural constraints on individuals' mobilities, and the exclusionary

construction of the cycling citizen. The policy documents also reflected cycling as the domain of a specific type of citizen; one that has been colloquially coined as a MAMIL (middle aged man in lycra).

Based on this analysis we argue that policy and planning efforts to improve the adoption of sustainable mobilities must explicitly consider how certain cycling practices, cultures, policies and infrastructure may be exclusionary or work against policy intentions. We further argue that these policy making and implementation efforts must also be cognisant of the way identities and social positioning may affect one's willingness and/or capacity to switch modes and of the role of policy in shaping these.

References

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