

Cycling Cities

Fietsersbond

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**Copenhagen
wins**

**Denmark vs
the Netherlands**

**The image
of cycling**



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Editorial

Formula

Copenhagen invests heavily in cycling facilities. Not because ‘them’ at city hall particularly like bicycles, but because Copenhagen has discovered that all those cyclists turn the city into a pleasant place to live. The benefits are obvious: a bicycle doesn’t pollute, cyclists don’t cause any traffic congestion and they are fitter too. Copenhagen is full of cyclists now. Nearly four in ten commuters cycle into work, and the city wants *half* of the residents to use their bikes in six years’ time. The ambitions are infectious. It’s nearly a full day’s work for council officials to speak to delegations from all over the world. Metropolises across the globe are faced with pollution, congestions and obesity. Denmark is not the only country with a lot of cyclists; in the Netherlands too, bicycles are a normal part of daily life. Everyone has a bicycle and uses it to get to work, the shops, the nursery or school. The bicycle is so commonplace, that we in the Netherlands would almost forget that it’s something special. With their successful cycling policies, the Netherlands and Denmark offer the world a formula that turns the city into a habitable and attractive place.

Michiel Slütter
Chief Editor of the *Vogelvrije Fietser*,
the magazine of the Dutch Cyclists’ Union
m.slutter@fietzersbond.nl



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Copenhagen, 'the ultimate cycling city'

Copenhagen cherishes its cyclists. 'We'd be mad not to promote cycling.' The ambitions are infectious.

Local governments around the world now want to *Copenhagenize* their cities.

Text:
Michiel Slütter
Photography:
Michiel Slütter

Officials and politicians from American cities were extremely relieved when they saw six-lane roads in Copenhagen. They've also got those back home, but still the Danes managed to get them on a bike. That gave them hope. 'Before that, the Americans had visited Amsterdam', says Andreas Rohl, who is responsible for the Copenhagen cycling policy. 'They thought Amsterdam was something out of a fairytale, whereas Copenhagen was more realistic.' A city such as Amsterdam with its narrow streets is perfect for cycling. But what can you do in a city that has easy car access, wherever you go? Still, Copenhagen managed to pull it off, and the Americans see the Danish approach as a source of inspiration.

Cycling is popular among officials and politicians around the world in terms of solving big city and everyday life issues, such as obesity, congestion and pollution. A lot of metropolises have enthusiastically set up cycling projects. That interest should be the opportunity for the

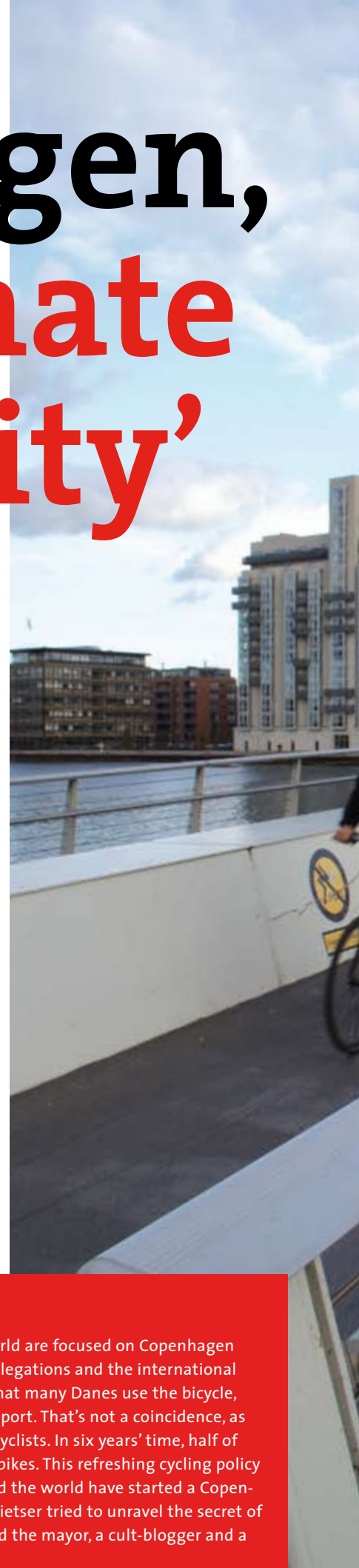
Netherlands to show the world the way in terms of cycling.

Most popular

Instead it's the Danes who get all the international attention. For years, people around the world obviously thought that Amsterdam was the ultimate cycling city. But now they're starting to look at Copenhagen. A BBC programme shot last year, called Copenhagen 'the most popular place in Europe for cyclists'. CNN and ABC camera crews are also scouring the Copenhagen cycle tracks for news about the city that

Copenhagen special

In December 2009, the eyes of the world are focused on Copenhagen because of the climate conference. Delegations and the international press will not have escaped the fact that many Danes use the bicycle, an entirely CO₂-neutral mode of transport. That's not a coincidence, as the city is really committing itself to cyclists. In six years' time, half of commuters are expected to use their bikes. This refreshing cycling policy is a source of inspiration. Cities around the world have started a Copenhagenisation process. The Vogelvrije Fietser tried to unravel the secret of Copenhagen's success and interviewed the mayor, a cult-blogger and a city planner.



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Photo : Mikael Colville-Andersen/copenhagenize.com

aims to be 'the world's best city for cyclists'.

The attention is well-deserved. Copenhagen is not just about ambitious words, it actually *does* a lot for its cyclists. The city's policy documents are void of any moaning about poorly parked bikes or anarchistic road behaviour. The city cherishes its cyclists, it listens to the cyclist's wishes. The reason? The city wants to get more people onto their bikes. At the moment, 37 per cent of commuters working or studying in Copenhagen use their bicycle.

The target for 2015 is 50 per cent. 'I'm sure we're going to achieve it', says Klaus Bondam. He is the 'technical and environmental mayor' of Copenhagen, a kind of alderman. After the main mayoralty, his position is one of the most prestigious on the city council. Bondam has created a distinct profile for himself in terms of cycling policy, and he has managed to find a council majority for his ambitious objectives.

How does he feel about Amsterdam losing its glory? 'We used to say that we were in friendly competition with Amsterdam, but with the



elections around the corner, I'd say: we've caught up with Amsterdam.' Klaus Bondam laughs when saying this, but there's a serious undertone. He wants to market the Copenhagen approach. 'Us Danes used to be introverted people. I decided that it was time for a strong international strategy.'

The secret

But first: what's the secret of Copenhagen? Its current cyclist-friendly climate started with pedestrians. In 1962, Danish town planner Jan Gehl proposed to pedestrianise one inner-city street, by way of experiment. Shopkeepers complained, but they were assured that this was only an experiment. Gehl was going to keep an accurate check on the number of visitors. He believed that pedestrianised areas would make the city a better place to live in. The experiment was a success, and figures showed that shopkeepers had more than their fair share of shoppers. In fact, the number of shoppers increased fivefold. Most of the old city centre is now car-free.

Based on his philosophy of a liveable and accessible city, Gehl set up an urban development agency. We



interviewed Helle Søholt, one of the agency's co-founders, about Gehl's urban development approach. 'The pedestrianised area changed the city culture', says Søholt. 'Slowly but surely, the car lost ground. Suddenly, people in the city became visible again. A city where people can look each other in the eyes is a friendly city.'

Oil crisis

The bicycle came into view in the seventies. 'Due to the oil crisis,

prices shot up', says Søholt. 'You weren't allowed to drive on Sundays, and a number plate system allowed only half of cars into the city at a time.' The citizens revolted. They weren't angry about the fact that motorised traffic was curtailed, but they did demand a decent alternative and asked for cycling facilities. 'Sustainability, soft mobility (i.e. walking and cycling), was a hot item. You could say that the crisis was a blessing for the city.'

What followed was a frenzied cycle track construction project. Søholt stresses that there was no all-encompassing master plan. 'It grew organically.' Each time something was constructed, they tested whether it worked. Only the facts count, you have to know how many cyclists use a certain cycle track.

Thirty years ago, the Netherlands were on the same line as Denmark. 'The Netherlands led the way with traffic calming measures.' Traffic access to residential areas was restricted and cars had to drive slower. But the Netherlands have lost that mantle of pioneer. All that the Dutch are concerned with now is traffic management. 'Traffic is part of city life, not the other way round.' Søholt wants to create a pleasant public space.

That same message, in almost exact the same wording, echoes on in mayor Klaus Bondam's office. 'All we're concerned about is how to create a pleasant and safe city where everyone feels safe.' The bicycle happens to be a good instrument for that. He has also taken note of

Facts and figures

- Of all commuters who come to Copenhagen to work or study, 37 per cent use their bikes.
- But, 55 per cent of the population of the municipality of Copenhagen cycle into work, school or university.
- 1 per cent cycles for a better world. The majority cycles because it's fast and convenient.
- Cyclists in Copenhagen cycle 1.2 million kilometres every day.
- More than one in twenty households has a carrier tricycle.
- A quarter of families with young children in Copenhagen have a carrier tricycle.
- Yet only 2 per cent of cyclists are annoyed about all those carrier tricycles.
- The Danes like to cycle at pace. For phased traffic lights for cyclists, planners assume an average cycling speed of 20 km/h.
- According to mayor Klaus Bondam, the Louise bridge is the busiest cycle track in Europe. It is used by 36,000 cyclists each day. An additional track for cyclists should prevent congestion.
- The number of serious road casualties among cyclists has halved, from 252 in 1996 to 121 in 2008. The city aims to halve this again within six years' time.
- Every two years, the city phones up more than 1,000 citizens to ask them whether they are still happy with the cycling policy.
- The Danes do not worry about the price tag of a bicycle. Students pay an average of 400 to 550 Euros. An average Copenhagen citizen is prepared to pay 650 to 800 Euros for a bicycle.
- All taxis have bicycle carriers. You can bring your bike for only three Euros.



Fast bikes

Cyclists in Copenhagen don't like to dawdle. Their pace is much higher than what we're used to. For that you do of course need a fast bike. Sports models are therefore extremely popular, as are *fixies* (fixed-wheel bicycles). Copenhagen is probably the city with most *fixies* in the world.



Gehl's lesson about counting. 'We know exactly how many cyclists and pedestrians pass a certain street corner. It's all about facts, which are more important than opinions.' Bondam knows the facts. From the top of his head, he gives us the traffic counts on the Nørrebrogade, an artery which he closed off to through traffic.

Strategic communication

This controversial project is one of many plans that should make the city attractive to cyclists. Rohl, the cycling official, tells us about fast cycle tracks that run from the suburbs into the city, more phased traffic lights, investments in safe cycling routes to school, comfortable cycle tracks and cycling lessons for immigrants. The Dutch know all about this.

But there's more. Rohl thinks 'strategic communication' is important. 'We'd be mad not to promote cycling. Investments in cyclists yield a lot.' The city ordered a calculation. Each cycled kilometre yielded a public benefit of 1.22 Danish Krone (16 Eurocents), while a motorised kilometre cost 0.69 Danish Krone (9 Eurocents). Based on those calculations, no one is likely to cycle more. What does help - at least, that is what the city assumes - are the bicycle counters that have been installed in busy locations. On the Dronning Louises Bro (bridge) for instance. More than one and a half million cyclists have passed since June. The city's message: 'we want you to cycle.'

The city comes up with all sorts of ideas to pamper cyclists. When a bridge had been closed due to road works, a temporary bridge was built. It seemed to float on the water. A special experience, according to Rohl. 'We also built a cycle bridge across a busy access road. Every driver sees that bridge, a bridge especially for cyclists. We do our best to make those bridges look attractive.' It's the same message over and over again: Copenhagen wants us to know that cyclists are appreciated. That positive and optimistic approach is popular, also on an international level. The Danish cycling policy is copied and in that case, a city is *Copenhagenized*. This word is the brainchild of Mikael Colville-Andersen. The film maker and photographer started a blog entitled *copenhagenize.com*. This blog (in English) is about cycling in Copenhagen and everything that has anything to do with everyday cycling around the world. He receives a lot of attention and flies around the world to give lectures. British newspaper *The Independent* calls it a cult blog. In Copenhagen, on the eve of the climate conference, Colville-Andersen talks to the international press on a weekly basis, telling them about the blessings of everyday cycling in Copenhagen. And so the Danes, who used to be so introverted according to Bondam, now suddenly find themselves the centre of attention. Colville-Andersen jokingly says that Copenhagen is now into 'shameless self-marketing'. ←

The Danish cyclist versus the Dutch cyclist



Text and
photography
Michiel Slütter

In Copenhagen, a bicycle is as commonplace as in the Netherlands. There are however big differences between the Danish and Dutch cycling cultures. Lise Bjørg Pedersen of the *Dansk Cyklist Forbund* (the Danish Cyclists' Federation) visited the Netherlands last spring. She was struck by a number of things.

- The Danes have better-quality bicycles.
- Dutch cyclists ride considerably slower than the Danish.
- To many Danes, the bicycle forms

part of their identity. In Copenhagen, it's not unusual to spend a lot of money on your old bike and to have it re-sprayed in striking colour combinations.

- In the Netherlands, no one wears a bicycle helmet, not even children, much to Pedersen's amazement. In Copenhagen, the helmet is a hot fashion item. Sales have exploded over the past year. Bicycle shops suddenly found themselves without any helmets.

And what struck us, the Dutch?

- Rusty old city bikes are indeed an unknown phenomenon in Copenhagen. Danes ride more luxurious bicycles.
- And perhaps that is why the Danes ride so much faster. You're getting somewhere. But cycling side-by-side is 'not-done'. If someone's in the way, the first thing you'll hear is the loud tinkling of bells. We felt it came across as a bit angry, but the Danes assured us that it's not meant that way.



'Get lost, old man!'
Drawing: Mette Dreyer

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Høfligheden

In Denmark too, people are worried about the (alleged) misbehaviour of cyclists. Peter Olesen was interviewed by *Cyklister*, the magazine published by the Danish Cyclists' Federation. He has written a book about etiquette: *Høfligheden*, and has dedicated an entire chapter to cyclists. 'I'm a fanatical cyclist', Olesen tells *Cyklister*, 'but I don't race. That's why I always notice the aggressive takeover manoeuvres and the 'me-me-me' mentality on the cycle track. I've got foreign friends who are shocked by the aggression when they venture onto the cycle track. They've been called names. That's why this chapter serves as a hint: cyclists, be a bit nicer to each other.' The Dutch Cyclists' Union has identified the same behaviour and will therefore start a behaviour campaign next spring.



- The Danes are disciplined cyclists. Hardly anyone drives against traffic, they hardly ever jump a red light, hardly anyone wobbles or rides on the left unnecessarily, and when Danes brake, they stick their hand in the air to warn cyclists behind them.
- Danes do not carry passengers on the luggage carrier. They use tricycle carriers for that. ←



Carrier tricycles

The municipality of Copenhagen is quite lenient when it comes to issuing licences for street selling on a carrier tricycle. This has led to a surge of carrier tricycle stands where you can buy newspapers, coffee, fruit or ice cream. In the city centre you can get pancakes from a carrier tricycle fitted with electric hot plates. Council workers, postmen; everyone uses a carrier tricycle.



The fastest carrier bicycle

The Bullitt is perhaps the fastest carrier bicycle in the world. Bicycle couriers just love them. But Danish mothers still have to get used to them.

Hans Bullitt always was a fanatic bicycle racer. Until he became a father. Suddenly he found himself out on the road on a carrier tricycle. That's the way it goes in Copenhagen. A quarter of families with young children have a carrier tricycle. He didn't like the cumbersome and slow carrier tricycle. 'It's like moving from a sports car to a tractor.' Bullitt felt there had to be a faster way of transporting the kids. During his search for a faster carrier cycle, he returned to a Danish tradition. In the old days, the black Long John transport bike was a familiar sight in the Danish streets. It looks very much like the carrier cycles that have gained so much popularity in the Netherlands during the past few years. The Long Johns are still out there, and according to Bullitt they are collector's items. 'It's a practical bicycle that enables you to transport heavy loads.'

Bright colours

At Bullitts' request, a bicycle designer friend created a modern-day Long John. The result is a fast carrier bicycle with a comfortable deep seat, gears and a brightly-coloured aluminium frame. My first few metres on the Bullitt were a bit awkward, but that soon changed. The Bullitt is comfortable and I just whizzed past other

cyclists. The bicycle is much faster than its Dutch counterparts by bakfiets.nl and De Fietsfabriek. And after having seen the Bullitt, Dutch carrier bicycles suddenly seem cumbersome and old-fashioned.

Safety

Its fast and sporty image makes it an attractive bike for fathers. Danish mothers however, are a bit apprehensive about a carrier cycle on two wheels. The fact that the Bullitt is faster and more comfortable doesn't seem to impress them. 'Women always look for safety. And all their girlfriends have already opted for a carrier tricycle.' In order to convince women, he has fitted a fake leather seat with safety belts that would befit a car. He has to, because in the end, it's the Danish mothers who make the ultimate decision about the purchase of a carrier cycle.

Dutch mothers and fathers are already used to carrier bicycles. Perhaps the Bullitt would be easier to sell in the Netherlands. With the Bullitt you will in any case distinguish yourself from other parents at the nursery or school gates. The cheapest Bullitt costs 1,800 Euros, while the most expensive one carries a price tag of 2,685 Euros. More information: www.harryvslarry.com ←

Text:
Michiel Slütter

Mikael *copenhagenizes* the world

Three years ago, photographer and filmmaker Mikael Colville-Andersen placed a photograph of an ordinary cycling woman on his blog, which led to a mountain of replies. He is currently the uncrowned cycling ambassador of Copenhagen.

Text:

Suzanne Brink

Photography:

Michiel Slütter and
Mikael Colville-
Andersen

'The Danish Cyclists' Federation *does* have to be in favour of the helmet. Otherwise they won't get any more money.' Copenhagen's unofficial Cycling Ambassador Mikael Colville-Andersen is not averse to a bit of provocation towards cycling organisations in Copenhagen. And he can afford to. 'I'm the only one who's independent. Honestly, I'm telling you the truth', he says with a wink.

Because Colville-Andersen is not a member of any organisation whatsoever. He declined an offer to become a member of the Danish cycling embassy. But, official job or not, no one who comes to Copenhagen and wants to find out more about cycling can ig-

nore him. He is invited to international cycling congresses in New York and France, and advises cities in Eastern Europe on how to sell cycling to their citizens. 'I'm going to France next week. I'm guest of honour, along with the Mayor of San Sebastian. Unbelievable, isn't it?' He has shown around about a hundred and fifty people from around the world who are involved with cycling. And now it's the turn to the editors of the *Vogelvrije Fietser*, the magazine of the Dutch Cyclists' Union.

Path of conversation

We've arranged to meet at Baisikeli, a Danish bicycle hire company that

sends its proceeds to Africa. The first thing he does is give us a badge, showing the beautiful bicycle logo you see everywhere in the city. Along with a companion, Colville-Andersen is responsible for the logo that shows phased traffic lights on cycle tracks. One of the classics on his guided tours is the bicycle counter on the Dronning Louises Bro (bridge). He bursts into laughter when he sees the sticker stuck underneath the counter, saying: you are *fixie* no. 06969. Fixies (fixed-wheel bicycles) are much more popular here than they are in the Netherlands. Colville-Andersen: 'I'm often here with other people, looking at that counter and the cyclists on this cycle track,







Colville-Andersen:
'Instead of cyclists, you need to warn motorists'

and I can't recall the number of times people were really surprised by that. Many of them don't even know that Copenhagen is so special because of the large number of cyclists. Once they've seen it, they're proud.' The cycle track was recently widened. 'The municipality used to refer to it as a high-speed cycle track, but now they call the oldest part the path of conversation.'

Copenhagenise

It started three years ago, with a simple black & white photograph taken against the light: woman in skirt gets off bike in front of traffic light. That was all. But blogger Mikael was inundated with responses, especially from America. 'To me, it was what an igloo is to an Eskimo: hardly worth taking a picture of.' But the Americans in particular thought differently. He got one response after the other. How on earth can she cycle wearing a skirt? Why isn't she wearing a helmet? What about the high-visibility jacket? 'I hit a nerve', says Colville-Andersen, who originally is a filmmaker, photographer and graphic designer. The time is ripe. Things are brewing in cities across the globe. Traffic comes to a standstill and cycling seems the ultimate solution. When he saw the number of visitors to his blog rise, he had to make a choice. 'When you've got a blog, you have to put something on it everyday, otherwise there's no use. So I either had to stop or take it seriously.' And anyway, you *have* to respond. His inbox is full each day, especially with e-mails from Americans.' When something happens in New

York in terms of cycling, I'll have fifty e-mails the next day. His readers send him pictures and videos of the world's longest cycle bridge in Spain, or an Australian woman who's appearing in court because she refuses to wear a helmet. copenhagenize.com is full of international cycling news, and Mikael gives his opinion.

Calling the blog Copenhagenise has turned out to be a brilliant move. To *Copenhagenise* is now a verb used by policy makers the world over, and means as much as laying out a city so that cycling there is as good as it is in Copenhagen. On copenhagenize.com, Colville-Andersen fumes about the fear culture of the Danes, and the campaigns that encourage cyclists to wear

'How on earth can she cycle wearing a skirt?'

a helmet, which in his opinion undermines the pursuit of more cycling. 'Suppose you're trying to sell a car by constantly saying: 'it's dangerous you know. Seatbelts on.' That won't work.'

Humorous campaigning

Mikael Colville-Andersen is a modern-day campaigner. Nagging only rubs people up the wrong way. He says this with a twinkle in his eye. He completely twists the helmet issue by making videos that plead for the use of a helmet when you're on the computer

at home. After all, most accidents occur at home. Or they show you that helmets are also very useful for other things: if you stick it underneath your luggage carrier, you can carry two beers in it. Stick two helmets together, and you can use it as a football. He points to his packet of cigarettes: 'You know, by law they're required to dedicate thirty per cent of a cigarette packet to warnings. Imagine they would introduce that for cars, the real danger. Sticking warnings on thirty per cent of a car: Driving kills. That would take away some of the appeal, wouldn't it?' Another idea: billboards that say: '*Please don't kill or maim any pedestrian or cyclists with your car today. Now stop reading and concentrate.*'

'Turn it around.' He's not afraid of being called anti-car. 'Emphasise the disadvantages of a car. But use humour.'

Humour also defines the *Slow Bicycle Movement*, set up to compensate for those who regard cycling as a sport. slowbicyclemovement.org shows videos of people who try to ride only a few metres in the longest time possible. He's up against Marc van Woudenberg from Amsterdam, among others. If you've ever cycled in Copenhagen, you know that the Dutch will effortlessly win such a slow-cycling competition. The Danes are fast cyclists. Van Woudenberg is also the man behind Amsterdamize.com. The web is full of cycling blogs by militant cycling campaigners. Eastern Europeans, Australians, a lot of Americans and some Africans. Click on the links on copenhagenize.com.

Cycle chic

Mikael's Cycle Chic has inspired at least thirteen others to start taking stylish pictures of clothed cyclists (read: women). High heels, short skirts, barely-there dresses, but also big balaclavas and stylish winter fashion. Quite a difference with three years ago, when a single picture of a woman in skirt on a bike created such a stir. To the Dutch, a woman in skirt on a bike is of course child's play, as an igloo to an Eskimo. The message

we could derive from this should rather be: wear something a bit more glamorous instead of that inevitable pair of jeans. And I wish we had such a striking logo to encourage people to cycle.

In his blogs, Mikael tirelessly gives compliments and criticism. Brow-beating by the government: wrong. Humour: good. He tells us about the difference between a use-your-lights campaign in Denmark and the Netherlands. The Danish spot depicted a skull

with a big red cross through it, cycling in the dark. He's put the Dutch advertising spot on his own anti-helmet site. It shows a boy and a girl being caught in the act just when the boy pulls up the girl's blouse. Bicycle lights are lit up on their backs. 'Remember not just to switch them on, but also to switch them off', the voice-over says. The Netherlands model country? Still? The Dutch Cyclists' Union can do no wrong. 'You should open an annexe in Copenhagen.' ←



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This, a rather innocent picture in our opinion, created a big stir three years ago.

Photo: Mikael Colville-Andersen/copenhagenize



‘We’ve caught up with Amsterdam’

At home, he is known as an actor in a popular Danish TV series. Yet Klaus Bondam is also a politician. In his capacity of environmental mayor, he was responsible for the cycling policy of the past three years. And boy, don’t the citizens of Copenhagen know it.

Text and
photography:
Michiel Slütter

If Copenhagen citizens didn’t know him as an actor, they will certainly know who he is now. To the joy of many cyclists, Mayor Klaus Bondam had the guts to close off a busy link road (the Nørrebrogade) to through traffic. ‘A lot of people hate me for it. They write letters to the newspapers.

It was fine the way it was, they write. What he did is ridiculous; we’ve got to stop him.’

According to Bondam, closing off the Nørrebrogade is what it’s all about in the big cities these days. ‘National parliament keeps on discussing Muslims and Islam. In the city however,

the most important discussion is about access to the city and about spatial distribution’, says Bondam. He’s proud of the fact that, despite all resistance, he closed off the Nørrebrogade. The number of cyclists subsequently rose from 30,000 to 36,000 per day. And as such, it is the busiest



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cycling track in Europe says Bondam. Phased traffic lights have also been set up. Before twelve in the afternoon, you can ride into the inner city without having to stop. Then the process is reversed and you can cycle back to the suburbs without having to stop. Danish planners have assumed quite a speed; you will hit the green light, as long as you cycle at a pace of about twenty km/h. If it's up to Bondam, the Nørrebro-gade is the first of many projects. He wants to curtail motor traffic even further. He's a confirmed advocate of a congestion charge such as the

one introduced in London. 'Seventy-five percent of Copenhagen citizens support it. So does the business community. It's just that government won't allow us! He has set his hopes on the opposition who, according to Bondam, will rule the country after the next elections. 'We really need that congestion charge, because with

'We need that congestion charge'

today's traffic we can't meet the EU requirements for fine dust and noise pollution.'

You really want to curtail the use of a car?
'Yes! Without a doubt.'

In the Netherlands, a lot of politicians dare not broach the subject of drastically curtailing the freedom of the car.

'In that case I wonder if that person, as a politician, is actually doing his best to convince people.'

And you want to give cyclists more space. What, by widening cycle tracks at the expense of the car?

'That's indeed the main issue. It's about setting priorities and not accepting that cars are given most space on our city streets.'

Why is cycling so important to you?
'A bicycle is a means to an end. I'm looking for a pleasant urban environment, with space for everyone. Thanks to the bicycles, we're not flooded with cars.'

Denmark will host the climate conference in December. Are you looking to seize the opportunity to show the world what you've achieved?

'We're already doing that. We've got guests visiting us on a weekly basis, wanting to find out what we've achieved and what our goals are.'

Can the Copenhagen approach be copied?

'Melbourne and New York have already started to Copenhagenize. They're laying cycle tracks the way it's done in Copenhagen. We're an example to other cities. When the mayor of Chicago visited us at the end of September, the first thing he wanted to do was get on a bicycle and head into the city.'

Why is it so important to you to convey the cycling policy of Copenhagen internationally?

'Two years ago, I attended the Bali climate conference. At a city meeting, Copenhagen was praised by Nick Gavron, the former deputy mayor of London. I was quick to say that London is also a very pleasant city. After the meeting, she came up to me and told me that medium-sized cities such as Copenhagen are important laboratories. If you're able to get a lot of people on a bicycle in a city as Copenhagen, then that's proof that it's possible. She can use the Copenhagen example to convince others to try it out in London as well. What we've shown in Copenhagen, is that sustainable development can go hand in hand with economic development.'

Can the bicycle contribute to solving the climate issue?

'It is a local solution for a global pro-



**Top: Blind spot logo on truck
Bottom: Council workers in Copenhagen with carrier bicycle**



Danish Cyclists Federation

Cycling should be a safe, fun, easy and obvious choice everywhere in Denmark. The Danish Cyclists Federation (DCF) is devoted to promoting bicycling as means of transportation and recreation. With approximately 40 local branches and a membership of 20,000 it is firmly rooted in society. Founded in 1905, the DCF is one of the oldest cyclists' organisations in Europe. The main goal of the organisation has always been to strengthen the cycling culture in Denmark and promote the bicycle as a healthy and safe means of transportation. Every year the DCF runs two major campaigns. In May, *Vi cykler til arbejde* ('We ride to work'), is very successful in making approximately 100,000 Danes cycle to work every day for a full month. In September another campaign encourages more than 5,000 school classes all over Denmark to compete at cycling to school for two weeks.

blem. We all know that a third of CO₂ emissions are generated by traffic. So you need to do something about car use. That means more public transport, but also making investments in cycling. Copenhagen must remain the world's best city for cyclists. Encouraging people to use the bicycle is part of the plan to turn Copenhagen into a CO₂-neutral city, an eco-metropolis, by 2015.'

The talks with officials and translated policy documents have a positive ring to them. I get the impression that Copenhagen cherishes its cyclists. A good example of that are the bicycle counters, who show that every cyclist is important to the city.

'We want open and honest communication. I think that presentation is vital. I'm a professional actor, and I've always been involved with posters and advertising. Our logo, the bicycle and the abbreviation for Copenhagen, has become a trademark. I think it's extremely important to create a positive attitude towards cy-

cling. I myself set a good example by also taking the bike. On a bike, you can feel the mood in the city. Is there any tension? Or perhaps excitement, like when Obama visited us. Sitting on the bicycle, you truly live together in the city.'

At the moment, 37 per cent of commuters working in Copenhagen use their bicycle. You're aiming for 50 per cent by 2015. How are you going to achieve that?

'We've got so many plans. One of them is the construction of cycle tracks from the suburbs into the inner city. Another plan is to make cycling safer. We all know that people opt for a different mode of transport when they feel unsafe cycling. We invest nearly 50 million Krone (6.7 million Euros) in safe routes to school, enabling parents to take their children to school by bike. We do this, because we know that children who start cycling at an early age, will continue to do so once they've grown up. This way, more people will opt for the bike in the future.'

Amsterdam used to be the international cycling city. How do you feel about Amsterdam losing its glory?

'We used to say that we were in friendly competition with Amsterdam. But with elections round the corner, I'd say: we've caught up with Amsterdam.'

Bondam is saying this teasingly, as if it's a joke, but he does mean it. When it concerns a successful and innovative cycling policy, the world is now - according to Bondam - watching Copenhagen as the city that leads the way. ←

Cycling embassy

At the *Dansk Cyklist Forbund* (the Danish Cyclists' Federation), they are extremely pleased with the fact that Copenhagen is doing well internationally with its successful cycling policy. 'It creates obligations', says Lise Bjørg Pedersen of the *Dansk Cyklist Forbund* (DCF). Copenhagen must continue to commit itself to good cycling facilities. 'And the capital is a good example to the rest of the country. If new things are tested here and the results are good, other Danish cities can also use it.' Stronger still: Pedersen is convinced that the rest of the world should also take the lessons of Copenhagen to heart. The Danish Cycling Embassy was set up earlier this year in order to hawk the Danish cycling successes. The cycling industry, advertising agencies, governments and the DCF all work together in the cycling embassy. The cycling embassy is Pedersen's responsibility. And as is so often the case, money is a problem. However, the Danish Minister of Economic Affairs is rumoured to lend a hand. 'We want to portray Denmark as the ultimate cycling nation', says Pedersen. The bicycle is a typical Danish icon, which we can use to market the country. The UN climate conference in Copenhagen is the perfect opportunity to update journalists about Denmark the cycling nation. Hundreds of bicycles will be waiting for the journalists, ready for a trip along the cycling highlights.



After that, the journalists will meet scientific experts in city hall, who will explain the benefits of cycling. In the reception room, the cycling embassy will also introduce ordinary cyclists. Journalists will be able to interview a postman, an opera singer, an ambitious young consultant, a single mum, a family of four and an ambitious Muslim woman. In order to make it easier for the journalists, the ordinary cyclists have been selected on their language skills. For more information, please visit: www.cycling-embassy.dk



Cycling Embassy
of Denmark

The street as meeting place

I 
CPH

Gehl Architects advises cities such as New York, London, Mexico City, Melbourne, and now Rotterdam, how to make these cities more sustainable. 'A lot of architects design cities in the same way they were taught to design a teaspoon. That won't work.'



Text:

Suzanne Brink

Photography:

Gehl Architects
and Suzanne Brink

'A bicycle is a means, not the target', says Helle Søholt, partner of Gehl Architects, at their offices in Copenhagen city centre. 'The target is a liveable, sustainable city. A sustainable city is not just about the environment. It's also about social sustainability, quality of life. All those lonely people that have to visit a psychiatrist, it costs millions. Just like obesity. In some countries, life expectancy is falling because people are becoming obese. Obesity also costs a lot of money. Our vision is that a city is a place where people can see and meet each other. Too often, the objective of urban planning seems to be traffic flow. Traffic is not a target. Traffic is part of city life, not the other way round.'

'We're not Italians!'

In 1962, Jan Gehl of Gehl Architects closed off the Strøget shopping street to traffic. In those days, that was quite a revolutionary thing to do. Gehls used Venice as an example: no

cars, but streets full of people. Closing off the street was not something people took lying down. 'We're not Italians', the Danes argued. Shopkeepers thought they would end up bankrupt. Nothing was further from the truth. Strøget is now an extremely popular shopping street. Another three roads have been closed off to traffic now, and the street is in one of the largest car-free zones in the world. The Danes are a bit like Italians now. The place is full of terrace chairs with blankets, protecting you against the cold. Also, the number of journeys by bike in Copenhagen has risen sharply, to 37 per cent. The citizens of Copenhagen are getting used to the fresh air.

Counting is the basis

How does a city go about something like that? By simply closing off roads to traffic and laying a couple of cycle tracks? Søholt: 'It took Copenhagen thirty years to get where we are now. We didn't have a master plan. A city



Madison Square New York



In Copenhagen there are warm blankets on terrace chairs to protect you against the cold

Gehl Architects always starts with counting



should be able to develop. A sustainable city doesn't materialise from one day to the next, but that doesn't mean that I think the process could not be sped up. In New York for instance, a cycle track was laid within two months of the plan being presented.'

Cities around the world turn to Gehl Architects for advice. Rotterdam is one of them. Jan Gehl advised this city to make better use of the water, and to replace parking spaces along the quay with footpaths and terraces. Shopkeepers in Rotterdam too are afraid that less space for cars equals less turnover, but Gehl can eliminate that fear by presenting us with some hard facts. Because although sustainability and a holistic approach may seem vague to some people, Gehl uses measurements as a basis. At the entrance of Gehl Architects hangs a tray full of counters, and there's a reason for that. Counting forms the basis for the advice they give.

Søholt: 'Jan Gehl used to do it, and the first thing we still do when we advise another city is: count. We hire people from local universities who count passersby anywhere, at different times of the day and year. Most studies only count motorists, but we also count pedestrians and cyclists. Those figures alone can make people face the facts. 'So many pedestrians!' the policy makers say.' At Gehl Architects it's not just about the hardware (the infrastructure), but also about the software (building a culture where people accept cycling and walking as normal). Søholt: 'Such a cultural change takes time. It's a process that takes years.' She tells us about New York, where roads for motorised traffic have been narrowed to make way for footpaths and terraces. It looks very simple. The section of asphalt intended for pedestrians and terraces has been painted.

Belgrade's nightlife

And is a city that the Danes enjoy also a city that can be enjoyed by the Chinese? Søholt: 'There are two things: comfort and culture. Around the world, people sit on a sofa in the same way. That's comfort. They try and find shelter against a cold wind, and when it's too hot, they seek a shady spot. In Denmark, high buildings take away too much heat, but in Dubai, that could actually be quite pleasant. On the other hand, there are the cultural differences. To Asians, a square is where you hold military parades. The problem in America is that people feel that having a car is part of their culture and that they are entitled to reach their destination by car, no matter what. I say: no. You have the right to reach your destination, but that doesn't necessarily have to be by car.' It's never going to be a routine job says Søholt. 'Each city is different. I was extremely surprised to see the bustling nightlife out in the streets of Belgrade. They're not like the



Danes, who spend their evenings indoors. That's something to be proud of and to use as a basis.' Another project is Mexico City, the first city in a deve-

'If the mayor wants to cut tapes, fine, but it's not what we care about'

loping country for Gehl Architects. Søholt: 'They have to do something. The average speed of a car in Mexico City is 12.5 km/h. They've tried everything, including overhead roads. Mexico City can be reached via number of multi-lane super highways. In between those super highways are sixteen districts with relatively narrow streets, which are not much fun to drive through by car. Our advice is to improve public transport on those super highways and to introduce a cycling structure in the districts, enabling people from the districts to reach the bus stations by bike. Unfortunately, Mexico was hit hard by the crisis, so things go a bit slower than planned. Another aspect, something we hadn't encountered in the developed western countries, is trust. They don't want to leave a bicycle outside. People are afraid out in the streets. The perceived fear of crime is high.'

Idealists?

Søholt is hesitant to answer the question whether Gehl Architects is unique in its approach. She mentions an agency in London that also measures the movements of people and traffic, but still, that's different. 'Yes, I guess

we are unique. If a city asks us to just look at a city's street map we always tell them that they can ask any random agency to do that. We provide both the hardware and software, we don't just fill in buildings. If the mayor wants to cut the tapes of the big achievements he will leave after his term of office, fine, but that's just a side issue. It's not what we essentially care about. We focus on the space between the buildings, which can be difficult at times. Our projects are long-term projects. That's why we can't talk to the politicians only, because they'll often be gone in four years' time. We talk to the planners.'

Idealists? 'We've got a certain vision which we believe in. There are too many architects who focus on urban planning. During their training they're taught how to design a beautiful utensil such as a teaspoon. And they're really good at it, but when they design a city, they apply the same principles, and that's where things go wrong. To us, it's not about beautiful buildings, but about quality of life.' ←

Successes of the Dutch Cyclists' Union

There's no place on earth where a bicycle is as commonplace as it is in the Netherlands. And thanks to the Fietsersbond (the Dutch Cyclists' Union), which celebrates its 35th anniversary this year, the Dutch can cycle in comfort and safety. Here are some of the successes of the Fietsersbond.

Text:
Michiel Slütter
and
Suzanne Brink

1975 Foundation of the ENWB

The Fietsersbond started life as Eerste, Enige, Echte Wielrijders Bond (the first and one and only cycling association). The association wanted to reduce the number of road fatalities among cyclists. The bicycle had to be given more space, the car less. In 1979, the ENWB had to change its name, after the ANWB (Royal Dutch Touring Club) sued them. They changed their name to ENFB, Enige Echte Nederlandse Fietsersbond (the one and only Dutch Cyclists' Union). In 2000, they changed name again, and have since been called Fietsersbond.

1983 30 km/h in residential areas

The 'Komitee 50 is te veel' of the Fietsersbond was fighting to reduce the maximum speed in built-up areas. In 1983, the then Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, Neelie Smit-Kroes decided that towns and cities were free to determine for themselves whether they wanted to introduce a 30-km zone in residential areas.

1993 Cycling in Comfort manual

Before 1993, the focus was on safe cycling. Things drastically changed in 1993. Council officials are issued with a manual that prescribed not just safety, but also comfort. The manual contained lots of ideas from the Fietsersbond. The road surface had to be smooth and wide enough. There should be direct cycling links and a town or city had to ensure that cyclists did not have to wait endlessly at a traffic light.

1997 Bicycle storage facilities

The Fietsersbond fought and lobbied hard for years in order to get more and better bicycles sheds at train stations. And not without success: more than half a billion Euros was invested. This seemed much, but the money was gone in the blink of an eye. The number of rail passengers cycling to railway stations rose sharper than expected. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of people cycling to railway stations rose by no less than 46 per cent. These days, nearly four out of ten rail travellers use their bikes to get to the station.



'Is there such a thing as a route planner for bikes?'



2000 Fietsbalans

In 1999, the Fietsersbond started to assess the cycling climate in Dutch towns and cities. Its test team used high-tech measuring equipment in order to record the speed of cyclists, cycling safety and whether there were enough storage facilities. The study was called Fietsbalans and its ultimate goal was for towns and cities to learn from each other. The winner could call itself Fietsstad, i.e. Cycling City. The Fietsbalans worked well. Towns and cities were glad to receive the reports from the Fietsersbond and sprang into action.

2001 Cyclists from the right

Ever since its foundation in 1975, the ENWB wanted to put cyclists on the same footing as other drivers by giving priority to cyclists coming from the right. Before the war, cyclists coming from the right were given priority, but the German occupation gave short shrift to that rule in 1940. In 1980, parliament adopted a motion to give priority to cyclists coming from the right, but it wasn't until 2001 that the rule came into force. The Fietsersbond held out the longest.



2005 **Mijn slechtste Fietspad report line**

'Crooked slabs or bumpy tree roots? Report your complaint here, preferably with pictures.' On the day the site went live, 10 May 2005, the Fietsersbond received 255 reports on poorly maintained cycle tracks via the Mijn slechtste Fietspad report line. During the first month, that number rose to 1,510 reports and now, after 4.5 years, more than 11,000 reports have been received. And it's not just about reports: 62 per cent of complaints are resolved.

2006 **Bicycle route planner**

'Is there such a thing as a route planner for bikes?' was the most frequently asked question to the Fietsersbond for years. Businesses found the idea of developing a bicycle route planner an unattractive one. After all, it would require a database with cycling links and information on road surface, surroundings or traffic nuisance. And all of this had to be manually entered. It would cost businesses the earth. The Fietsersbond however did manage to pull it off, thanks to the help from hundreds of volunteers. They assessed and entered all sorts of links, also updating the system with any changes. There are now bicycle route planners for the provinces of Drenthe, Flevoland, Friesland, Gelderland, Overijssel, Utrecht and Zuid-Holland. The province of Noord-Holland will go online at the end of 2009.

2007 **Cycling school**

Not everyone learns how to cycle at an early age and older people are often afraid to fall over. That is why the Fietsersbond started to train cycling teachers. They teach children, parents and adults across the country, people who never learned to ride a bike when they were young. Course participants first learn how to brake and swerve safely on a safe track and will then hit the road under constant supervision.

2008 **Decongested cycling**

Motorised traffic is coming to a standstill. Only if there are good and comfortable links between towns and cities can cycling be an attractive alternative. In 2008, the Fietsersbond started a study with local experts into the need for fast express cycling routes. What did certain locations need in order to facilitate uninterrupted cycling? A cycle bridge? An improved road surface? Work has started on decongested cycling routes between Delft and Rotterdam, Purmerend and Amsterdam and Apeldoorn and Deventer. These are routes between ten and twenty kilometres in length, where uninterrupted cycling on separate cycle tracks forms a good alternative to being stuck in traffic in a car.



The benefits of cycling

According to a Copenhagen survey, there's hardly anyone who cycles for a better world. Only one per cent of city folk use the bicycle to spare the environment. People merely opt for cycling because it's fast and convenient. That's why cities must ensure that cycling is the most attractive mode of transport and people will start cycling in no-time. Cities that consistently opted for the construction of good cycling facilities are rewarded with lots of cyclists. And that's something everyone benefits from. In the Netherlands, the Goudappel en Coffeng agency carried out a study in order to find out how much CO₂ people emit through their mode of transport. In cities with a high usage of bicycles, the average emissions per resident are lower. A resident of Almere emits twice as much CO₂ than a resident of Amsterdam. This difference can largely be explained by the use of bicycles: in Amsterdam, 38 per cent of all movements are made by bicycle, whereas that percentage is only 27 in Almere. What would the difference be if the use of bicycles would increase in all cities? The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency has calculated this. The standard for these calculations was Groningen. In this city, almost half of all movements are made by bicycle. If the whole of the country would achieve the level of Groningen, it would make a difference of between 0.8 and 0.9 Mton. That's about two per cent of the total CO₂ emissions for traffic and transport. According to researcher Hans Nijland that is 'a substantial contribution' to the climate policy. Another issue is that of health. American researchers compared the obesity statistics of different countries to those of active transportation. The result: countries with the highest levels of active transportation generally had the lowest obesity rates. An example: in the United States, a quarter of the population is obese. The share of active transportation and public transport is less than five per cent. In the Netherlands less than 10 per cent of the population is obese, and cycling, walking and public transport account for half of all movements. The conclusion is inevitable: high levels of cycling will create a better world.

2008 Airbags

The Dutch TNO and the Swedish Autoliv started to collaborate on the development of an airbag on a car's windshield. In a collision, an airbag can mean the difference between a dead and a dizzy cyclist. That was the result of an initial study by the reputable TNO research institute in 2008. The Fietsersbond gave the order for this study, which has come along rapidly and the actual development of a prototype of an external airbag is now in full swing. Implementing such airbags in the Netherlands alone may reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries among cyclists by 60 and 1,500 respectively. The Dutch government also thinks the airbag is a good idea and has contributed 1.3 million Euros to the study. ←



The Dutch Cyclists' Union

The Fietsersbond looks after the interests of everyday cyclists. The association has more than 33,000 members and continues to grow. Its most important work is carried out on a local level. It has more than 150 local branches, fighting for more and better storage facilities, safe routes and comfortable links in towns and cities.

For more information, please visit: www.fietsersbond.nl

Heel Nederland Fietst campaign

'We want to boost the image of cycling'



Many Dutch people are on unhealthy diets and exercise too little. In order to turn the tide, the Netherlands Institute for Sports and Physical Activity (NISB) and the Fietsersbond (Dutch Cyclists' Union)

will start a large-scale and long-term behavioural campaign in 2010: *Heel Nederland Fietst*.

Text:
Michiel Slütter

In the Netherlands, a bicycle is so commonplace, that no one ever thought it could be advertised. 'In the Netherlands, we have a saying: act normally, you're mad enough as it is. That also applies to cycling. Cycling is so commonplace, you don't have to pay any attention to it', says Hugo van der Steenhoven, director of the *Fietsersbond*.

But he feels that we must pay attention to cycling. Even in the Netherlands, there are many people who don't cycle. People who get in the car to travel a short distance. And that's a shame. For themselves - cycling keeps you slim and fit - but also for others. Fewer car kilometres means less air pollution, fewer CO₂ emissions and less danger to other road users.

In order to convince those who have not yet taken up cycling, the Fietsers-

bond and the NISB have set up a campaign to give cycling a new impulse: Heel Nederland Fietst.

'We want to boost the image of cycling. That doesn't happen overnight of course, we really have to sell it. We have to create an atmosphere that entices everyone to start cycling. Strangely enough, such a campaign has never been held before. So far, all promotional campaigns have been half-heartedly scattered throughout the country', says Van der Steenhoven. 'We want to follow Copenhagen's example and pay more attention to communication and marketing.'

Youngsters

According to project leader Peter-Jan Mol of the NISB, this campaign couldn't have come too soon. 'We may



think that the Netherlands are a cycling country. And yes, we do cycle a lot, but at the same time many youngsters grow up without getting on a bike. That's an alarming development which leads to increased car use and obesity. In order to convince youngsters that cycling is fun, we have to come up with creative campaigns. That's what we're doing at the moment.' Mol stresses that it will take more than a year for a behavioural campaign to have any major effects. 'It's a matter of who will hold out the longest, and that's why *Heel Nederland Fietst* will go on for three years. The NISB promotes an active lifestyle,



and cycling fits in well with that pursuit', says Mol. 'Cycling is one of the easiest ways of taking daily exercise. If you cycle a lot, you stay fit. And if you cycle instead of getting into a car, you are also helping to prevent climate change and improve accessibility.'

Tour de France

A lot of activities are still in preparation, but we can give a hint. 'In the run-up to the Giro d'Italia, which will start in the Netherlands, we want to break a world record in Amsterdam on 31 March. What we'll try and do is to get as many people as possible cycling

between twelve and one o'clock', says Van der Steenhoven. 'We're aiming for a million, at least.' The Tour de France also starts in the Netherlands, in Rotterdam. *Heel Nederland Fietst* wants to capitalise on that too. Van der Steenhoven: 'We're going to build a three-metre high mega bike, which will arrive in Rotterdam by boat. That way, we will take maximum advantage of the interest in cycling, and we motivate people to start exercising themselves.' The NISB is furthermore working on a so-called exercise routine, a bit like exercise on prescription, which does of course also include cycling. A total of

no fewer than 50 events are scheduled, which can be found on www.heelnederlandfietst.nl. TV commercials and promotional material will of course also form part of the project.

Objectives

With *Heel Nederland Fietst*, the organisers want to present the bicycle as a healthy alternative to the car. The ambitions of this campaign are big: cycling is to increase by five per cent and the number of car journeys below 7.5 kilometres must fall by three per cent, in favour of cycling.

The campaign focuses on four areas: cycling to school, to work, to parks and woods, and cycling in the neighbourhood. Here are some of the objectives: By 2012, the number of participants in the practical cycling exam at primary schools must have risen from 60 to 80 per cent. The number of people cycling into work must have risen from 25 to 28 per cent. And half of all businesses with more than 100 employees should have a cycling scheme. Cycling lessons are available in all problem neighbourhoods. And everyone knows how to get hold of a recreational route planner for a fun day out.

The Fietsersbond and NISB are not alone in this, and have received support from various civil society organisations in the fields of traffic, safety and sport. The Ministries of Public Health, Transport, Housing and Agriculture and Nature also contribute to and endorse the objectives of the campaign. Mol of the NISB: 'In order to achieve the ambitious objectives of *Heel Nederland Fietst*, you need to enjoy wide support from a lot of civil society organisations and ministries.'





Cycling pioneers visit Houten

Text:
Suzanne Brink
Photography:
I-CE and
Danny McL

Around the world, cycling is fashionable. Botswana, Brazil, India: they've all got the cycling bug. 'The rich see it in Europe.' But they're still fighting for more space. Cycling pioneers from developing countries visit Houten to get some ideas.

Nothing spoils their good mood. Not even one of the heaviest torrential rain showers in Houten's history, just when they're cycling around Houten. 'In the Netherlands, everyone is interested in developing countries and cycling', British-South African Lisa cheers. 'What a difference with England.' Their guided tour of Houten has been organised by I-CE, which stands for Interface for Cycling Expertise. This organisation helps out metropolises and smaller cities in developing

countries with training and coaching. Every now and then, participants meet up and exchange their experiences. In their own country they're often seen as downright weirdoes. Don Quixotes fighting the windmills. Or, as Anvita Arora from India puts it: 'Some think I'm crazy, but when I look around here, at least I know I'm not the only one.' Brazilian Zé Lobo of Transporte Ativo is another one of those Don Quixotes. As early as his schooldays he went everywhere by bike. 'I was

always going on about cycling, but I was the only one. I also wanted others to feel what it was like.' Between 1994 and 2004, cycling in Rio de Janeiro rose by two hundred per cent. Lobo has turned his passion into his job: he is the founder and director of Transporte Ativo and advises the local government and other authorities about cycling. Traffic planners now take him seriously, but things used to be different. 'They were the engineers and architects. They'd actually studied for this. In

Top:
Traffic chaos in Delhi
Bottom:
Anvita Arora (in the left
back of the velotaxi)



the early nineties they thought it was a good idea to create bumps in the cycle track in order to slow down “cyclists. “I’m sorry”, I said, “I don’t think that’s wise. It’s dangerous.” But they just wouldn’t believe me. Subsequently, there was one accident after the other and they were forced to remove the bumps. Nowadays they first ask us to have a quick look at it.’

Telenova

At the moment, Rio is the best cycling city in Brazil. Cycling is part of Rio de Janeiro’s municipal policy. In telenovas, a popular TV format in Brazil, people are also using bicycles. Celebrities have their picture taken, sitting on a bicycle. Ten years ago it was only the poor and youngsters who’d cycle, but they’ve been joined by a new group. ‘People are fed up with being stuck in traffic, and they also worry about the quality of air.’ Cycling has also become hot all of a sudden. ‘Girls in the richer parts of the city cycle to work wearing dresses. That would have been impossible a couple of years ago. A lot of people have been to Europe. There are also many different types of bicycles now.’ Politicians too sometimes venture out on a bike, but according to Lobo that’s more of a PR stunt. ‘They usually drive around in very big cars.’

Even at the reunion of his secondary school, he noticed things are really changing in Rio. ‘They used to laugh at me because I was always riding around on a bicycle. But this time, there were two others who’d also come by bike.’

‘My friends used to laugh at me because I was always riding around on a bicycle’

Courtesy bicycles in Botswana
In many countries, a bicycle is the poor man’s means of transport, and no one wants to be regarded as a poor man. There are plenty of cyclists in India for instance, but most of them only have one wish: to own a car. Or, if that proves too expensive, a moped.

Indian Sujit Patwardhan: ‘It’s no use telling people not to buy a car. I take a different approach. Sure, buy that car, I tell them, but think long and

hard about when you want to use it.’ In Botswana too, the bicycle is the poor man’s vehicle. Boat Modukanele of Cycling Botswana: ‘I know this business man who went to Europe and noticed that over there, bicycles are regarded as cool, but once he got home and onto his bike, his friends were worried: ‘Eh, what are you doing? Are you OK?’ He tried to reassure them. No, business was not bad, he just liked to cycle, but his friends persisted: ‘Come on, you can be honest with us!’

Cycling Botswana organises cycling tours for the rich, using courtesy bikes. Some of them buy one for themselves afterwards. Modukanele: ‘The rich saw in Europe that a lot of people use a bicycle. So they decide they want one too. They often only use it as a form of recreation, but it’s a start. The main thing is: once they start cycling, the bicycle becomes a status symbol instead of a poor man’s





vehicle. Also, they have the means and contacts to do something about facilities and infrastructures in the city, because those are still really awful. Don't forget, roads in Gabarone have four or five lanes. You've got cars coming at you from all directions. It's impossible to cross such a road by bike or on foot.'

Empowerment

As a child, Anvita Arora from Delhi was never allowed to cycle, because she was a girl. Delhi is dangerous.

A mother with two children on a carrier bicycle causes a great stir

Someone may rob or rape you. Public transport is also unsafe. As an emancipated woman, you do really need a car. But if you're poor, you just don't have the money for a car. Arora explains: 'If you're not mobile, you become incredibly dependent. Just imagine having only one car in the family and it's always being used by

the man of the house. Other family members depend on him to be taken to school or to go shopping.'

Arora now works for Innovative Transport Solutions. She fights for women's independence. And a bicycle may help women forward: empowerment by cycling. Innovative Trans-

port Solutions issues women with a bicycle and cycling lessons. Arora: 'They often have places to clean in different parts of the city. Walking takes ages and public transport is expensive. If they have a bicycle, they can have five houses to clean instead of three. It means she earns more





Zé lobo has turned his passion into his job.

money. That's also good for the man, but sometimes he still won't allow it. And things become really tense when she's starting to earn more than he does.' For safety reasons, the women cycle in groups. That way, cars will notice them.

'We have to create critical mass', Patwardhan keeps repeating. 'People's power.' The only way to prevent the population of India from getting into a car en masse is to create lots of 'proud cyclists' who will influence things. Poor people have to be proud of the fact that they're cycling. As it stands, they often think it's normal to be pushed off the road. Patwardhan: 'They think: I'm only a second-rate citizen anyway.' Another problem: corruption. Indian politicians prefer to build an expensive fly-over, because they can make big bucks on them.'

Carrier bicycles

Following lunch in Houten's relocated station the participants on their

courtesy bicycles are given a tour of Houten's famous infrastructure. Houten is green, has a spacious layout and is undoubtedly great for kids, but it's also typical VINEX (a site designated by the government for future urban development). Follow-

'Girls in the richer parts of the city cycle to work wearing dresses'

ing a question from the visitors, the guide explains: 'Houten isn't hip or cool, but it's a great place to live. It's extremely popular among families.' Favela from Brazil can't get over the cute Dutch gardens. 'I'm going to send pictures to my gran. She'll love it.' 'These bikes are so comfy', Namhla Jaxa from Cape Town, South Africa, sighs. 'They make you sit up nice and

straight. We don't have this sort of thing. Even old age pensioners get on their racing bikes in full gear. A mother with two children on a carrier bicycle causes a great stir. Photo cameras appear. The chaotically full bicycle stands at the station are also recorded for posterity. The Dutch may moan about them, but to someone who has to fight for every cycling metre, they look absolutely fantastic. ←

I-CE

I-CE stands for Interface for Cycling Expertise. The organisation supports members in developing countries who want to promote cycling. This is done by means of the Bicycle Partnership Program (BPP). I-CE's vision is that there's no blueprint for towns and cities, because different countries mean different situations. However, countries can still learn a lot from each other, despite these differences. I-CE facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experience between cycling activists from countries such as Zambia, South Africa, India and Brazil. In 2009, I-CE developed a manual for planners, engineers, policy makers and others involved in the cycling policy. www.cycling.nl



Colophon

Cycling Cities is a special English edition of the Vogelvrije Fietser, the magazine of the Fietsersbond (the Dutch Cyclists' Union).

Chief editor: Michiel Slütter
Editor: Suzanne Brink
Translation: Danielle van de Graaf-Hesselink
Design + layout: Akimoto graphic design
For more information: www.vogelvrijefietser.nl
E-mail: info@fietsersbond.nl

The Fietsersbond looks after the interests of everyday cyclists. The association has 33,000 members and more than 150 local branches, fighting for more and better storage facilities, safe routes and comfortable links in towns and cities. For more information: www.fietsersbond.nl

Fietsersbond
Postbus 2828, 3500 GV Utrecht, The Netherlands
++31 30 2918171, info@fietsersbond.nl

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