

CHAPTER 4

LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH TRAINING IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE NETHERLANDS TO CYCLE

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Introduction

As both a consultant and a cycling advocate, it is exciting to see the growing interest in cycling over the last five to ten years. Mayors of cities like Paris, Seville, Rome, London and New York talk cycling. A bookcase can be filled with books and magazines about cycling and bicycles feature in advertisements and shop windows. Dutch, Danish, and German cities and towns have become best practice examples and websites and social media platforms celebrate bicycle infrastructure and people on bikes.

The pictures, stories and discussions arising about bicycle infrastructure in these countries tend to be pretty detailed (Garrard, Rose & Sing, 2008). Additionally, there is a lot of criticism and debate about which “solution” works and which one does not (Martens, 2013). This is a good thing: discussions clarify and sharpen the mind. Yet in contrast, I see little detail in the writing, talking and showcasing of cycling culture in the Netherlands. Nor is there proper analysis, critique or debate about the nature of our cycling culture. Traffic education, training of cyclists and motorists and specific cycling promotion events are mentioned, but rarely described, researched or analysed. Dutch government officials are invited to speak about cycling and it is regularly stated that “cycling is in our DNA”, implying that cycling is something physiological. Consequently one could argue that it might be really hard for non-Dutch who want to promote cycling. This logic gives unwilling politicians, planners and engineers in other countries the perfect excuse to not invest in cycling. In her talk “Her Majesty’s Bicycle”

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(original: *De fiets van Hare Majesteit: Over Nationale Habitus en Sociologische Vergelijking*) Giseline Kuipers (2010) explained how the associations and backgrounds connected with cycling are for the most part irrelevant for the Dutch. Habits and uses around the bicycle are obvious “You just take the bicycle. Everyone cycles. You would not know how to do it differently” (Kuipers, 2010, p. 8). In an attempt to help fill the gaps in knowledge of Dutch cycling culture, this chapter explores the phenomenon of bicycle lessons for immigrant and refugee women in the Netherlands.

Dutch Women on Bicycles

Typically, international articles, magazines, websites and literature appreciate the fact that in the Netherlands many women ride bicycles (Pickup, 1988; Garrard, Handy & Dill, 2012; Arora 2012). In *Making Cycling Irresistible*, John Pucher and Ralph Buehler explain that levels of cycling in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany are not only high and growing, but that “cyclists comprise virtually all segments of society” (2008, p. 502). One of the facts with which they illustrate this, is that 55% of all bike trips in the Netherlands are made by women, compared to 28% of the trips in the UK and 24% in the USA. In between a set of numbers and graphs, a few words caught my attention: “cycling is gender-neutral in those three countries” (2008, p. 504).

This statement may be true for the term “gender” in the very narrow sense, only referring to a comparison of the average number of trips between males and females. But in a wider and more realistic perspective, gender refers to perceived differences between women and men and to the unequal power relations based on those perceived differences. In her article “Gender and Mobility: New Approaches for Informing Sustainability”, Susan Hanson stresses that “mobility is not just about the individual ..., but about the individual as embedded in, and interacting with, the household, family, community and larger society”

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(2010, p. 8). In her definition of gender she adds this perspective, in which the specifics of place, time and people are essential: "The processes that define gender are always inflected by other dimensions of perceived difference (e.g. age, ethnicity, physical ability) and develop through everyday practices in place, including of course practices relating to daily mobility" (Hanson, 2010, p. 8).

The notion of gender roles in society, connected with factors such as age and ethnicity helps us understand travel patterns and mode choices better (Hajinikitas, 2001; Lehner-Lierz, 2003; Greico 2006; Bonham and Wilson 2012). By looking deeper into the Dutch case from this non-infrastructural perspective it becomes clear that it is much more accurate to say that cycling infrastructure is gender neutral in the Netherlands. The use and image of the bicycle are not.

Differences in Bicycle Use

In societies where it is mostly women who are responsible for running the household and for care for children and the elderly, improvement of the accessibility of shops, schools and health care services by bicycle is an important measure to increase cycling levels amongst women. At the same time, it is often overlooked that the same gender roles also influence women's opinion and concerns about safety in traffic. Women are not just concerned for their own potential to be injured or killed, but they also fear the consequences for daily life in their family in the case of an accident. As it is their responsibility to bring the children to school, for example, they will also take the child's perspective into account when thinking about safety en route. The following examples will illustrate that cycling is not gender-neutral in the Netherlands once we take factors like age, educational level, region and urban density into account and that gender roles matter even in countries with safe infrastructure.

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According to the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2012), from which all the following figures are drawn, the average bicycle travel time per person, per day in the Netherlands is 12.96 minutes. In Table 4.1 we can see that 15- to 25-year-old males in the south of the Netherlands and 15- to 24-year-old females in the north of the Netherlands have a bicycle travel time of over 24 minutes a day, almost twice as much as the average. In contrast, 25- to 45-year-old males in the north and in the south of the country spend less than 8 minutes per day on the bicycle, which is almost equally low as 65+ females in the west and the south of the country who spend 7.68 minutes per day on cycling.

Table 4.1. Bicycle travel time per person, per day according to age, gender and region (in minutes).

		0-15 years	15-25 years	25-45 years	45-65 years	65+ years	Total
Males	North	20.65	21.84	7.84	11.47	14.47	13.79
	East	18.64	17.49	8.00	11.52	13.52	13.03
	West	15.67	18.13	12.27	12.17	13.20	13.72
	South	19.33	24.71	7.67	10.25	11.12	13.07
Females	North	18.01	24.94	12.63	11.78	8.66	14.08
	East	16.50	21.12	9.08	11.93	9.49	12.72
	West	15.09	15.25	11.96	13.39	8.19	12.63
	South	13.63	15.69	10.25	11.16	7.68	11.16

If we look at the number of bicycle trips per person per day (Table 4.2), it is striking that in the 12- to 18-year-old age groups, both males and females have about 1.5 bicycle trips a day, whereas no other group older than 18 reaches even one trip a day. This supports the idea that for youngsters in the

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Netherlands cycling is a crucial way to get around independently. Of all adults, the 30-40 year old females come closest with an average of 0.87 bicycle trips a day. Men in the same age group have only 0.54 bicycle trips a day.

Table 4.2. Number of bicycle trips per person, per day according to age and gender.

	Males	Females	Males and females
Total	0.68	0.80	0.74
0-12 years	0.96	0.92	0.94
12-15 years	1.67	1.59	1.63
15-18 years	1.54	1.43	1.48
18-20 years	0.87	0.73	0.80
20-25 years	0.60	0.71	0.66
25-30 years	0.54	0.72	0.63
30-40 years	0.54	0.87	0.71
40-50 years	0.51	0.81	0.66
50-60 years	0.52	0.78	0.65
60-65 years	0.58	0.81	0.69
65-75 years	0.58	0.64	0.61
75+ years	0.47	0.25	0.34

Education also influences bicycle use in the Netherlands, especially when examined in combination with gender. Table 4.3 shows that the lowest bicycle travel times per day can be found amongst males and females of average educational levels. The highest bicycle travel times can be found amongst males

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with low educational qualifications and females with high educational qualifications.

Table 4.3. Bicycle travel time per person, per day according to gender and education (in minutes).

	Males	Females	Males and Females
Younger than 12	12.78	11.08	11.95
Low education	14.78	11.67	13.04
Average education	10.82	10.96	10.89
Higher education	13.01	13.40	13.20
Total	13.44	12.48	12.96

Table 4.4 gives figures for number of bicycle trips in the same categories as Table 4. The Dutch average is 0.74 bicycle trips per day.

The groups that contribute most to this high average figure are boys and girls up to 12 years old and women of higher educational levels. These three groups score between 0.92 and 0.96, almost one bicycle trip a day on average. The lowest levels can be found amongst all males above 12 years old (between 0.56 and 0.63) and women with low educational levels (0.65). Actually, it is only females of average education who score around the average.

Combining Tables 4.3 and 4.4, we see that lower educated males have a low number of bicycle trips per day, but those account for the highest number of minutes on the bicycle per day. The males with higher educational levels also have a low number of trips and an almost average time spend on the bicycle. Males of average educational levels combine the lowest number of trips on the bicycle with the lowest number of minutes on the bicycle. The females with higher educational

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levels combine second highest numbers of trips with the second highest time spend on the bicycle. They spend almost as many minutes on the bike as men of lower educational levels, but need more trips for it.

Table 4.4. Number of bicycle trips per person, per day according to gender and education.

	Males	Females	Males and Females
Younger than 12	0.96	0.92	0.94
Low education	0.62	0.65	0.64
Average education	0.56	0.73	0.64
Higher education	0.63	0.93	0.77
Total	0.68	0.80	0.74

The last table to illustrate that cycling in the Netherlands is not gender-neutral shows time spent travelling by bicycle correlated with country of birth and urban density of Dutch residence, further broken down by gender (Table 4.5).

Again, the starting point is that average bicycle travel time per person, per day in the Netherlands is 12.96 minutes. When we look at the total for all males, they cycle about a minute a day more compared to females: not a big difference. But when we look further we do see some interesting variations. Comparing different urban densities and gender for the category "both parents born in the Netherlands", the highest amounts can be found in very urban environments. Both males and females cycle almost 15 minutes a day. The lowest are the males and females in the little urban areas, cycling about 12 minutes a day, making a difference of about 3 minutes between the highest and the lowest amounts. For the "Origin in western country" category the difference increases to 5 minutes a day between the

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group with the most minutes of cycling a day (the males and females in very urban environments at 13.6 minutes a day) and the ones the with the least minutes of cycling a day (females in a non-urban environment).

Lastly, in the category "Origin in non-western country" there is a difference of almost 10 minutes a day. These males in the urban environment spend as much as 19 minutes a day on the bicycle and these females in the very urban and urban environment as little as 9 minutes a day. Of all groups in this table, the males originating from a non-western country, living in an urban environment, spend most time on the bicycle. Compared to native Dutch males and females about 5.5 minutes a day more. And females originating from a western country and living in a non-urban environment spend the least number of minutes on the bicycle; a little less than the females of non-western origin.

The figures confirm that factors like age, educational level, region, urban density and country of origin matter significantly when we look at bicycle use. If the choice to ride a bicycle were purely based on availability of safe, convenient and attractive infrastructure, then the cycling rates for native Dutch women, and those with a different origin living in the same type of environment, would be equal.¹

¹ Note that in Table 4.5 there are no separate figures for males and females of non-western origin available, so these are left out of the comparison. Numbers for the category "time spent travelling by bicycle correlated with country of birth and urban density of Dutch residence, further broken down by gender" are insufficient to be statistically viable.

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Table 4.5. Bicycle travel time per person, per day according to gender, country of birth and level of urbanisation (in minutes).

MALES AND FEMALES	Nether-lands	Very urban	Urban	Mode- rately urban	Little urban	Non-urban
Total	12.96	13.13	13.16	13.61	12.19	12.55
Both parents born in the Netherlands	13.36	14.61	13.23	14.16	12.32	12.83
Origin in western country	11.35	13.6	11.48	10.19	9.59	9.77
Origin in non-western country	11.51	9.36	14.04	11.43	13.80	9.65
MALES						
Total	13.44	13.25	13.83	13.99	12.78	13.18
Both parents born in the Netherlands	13.59	14.59	12.98	14.51	12.98	13.38
Origin in western country	12.28	13.65	13.15	11.35	9.99	10.69
Origin in non-western country	13.30	9.79	18.97	11.08	12.63	–
FEMALES						
Total	12.48	13.01	12.5	13.24	11.6	11.92
Both parents born in the Netherlands	13.12	14.63	13.47	13.81	11.66	12.29
Origin in western country	10.51	13.56	9.83	9.27	9.27	8.71
Origin in non-western country	9.72	8.96	9.10	11.80	15.07	–

A journey towards understanding the teaching of cycling

For native Dutch people it is hard to imagine what it is like to *not* being able to ride a bicycle. Still, one of the factors explaining

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the differences in bicycle use between women of diverse origin who all live in the Netherlands, is the fact that not all adults have the skills necessary to being able to cycle in traffic. Especially not when children need to be taken on the bicycle or have to be cared for by someone else whilst you are going to your activities. This is brilliantly illustrated by the story [Box 4.1] told in 2006 by a Moroccan mother who migrated to the Netherlands in 1973.

Not all women were lucky enough to have a neighbouring Mrs Prins and cycling lessons have been offered in women's centres, community centres and education centres for adults from the 1970s onwards. In fact, it was those women themselves who expressed an interest in cycling and identified the need to learn this in small groups in a somewhat protected environment (van der Kloof 2003). At first mainly women from the Mediterranean and from Surinam joined the lessons as those were the countries of origin of most immigrants. Over the years, refugee women and, to a lesser extent, female expats started to join the courses.

I became involved in organised bicycle lessons in spring 1991 when the Centre for Immigrant Women in Tilburg (Netherlands) recruited volunteers to teach women to ride bicycles. This was the start of my personal journey to teach women from all over the world to make the bicycle a new part of their daily lives. Being a student in my early twenties, having been brought up with the bicycle, did not necessarily mean that I would be good at teaching adults from all over the world to cycle though. In their book *Telling Ain't Training*, Stolovitch and Keeps (2002) explain how an expert is not automatically a good trainer.

You would think that if each of these SMEs (subject matter expert) knows so much, they should have no trouble making the other person learn. But it's not happening because experts and novices do not process information in the same way. In fact, the greater the expertise, the less the expert thinks like a novice learner" (2002, p. 31).

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Looking back at it, I think the situation was even worse, as I – a typical Dutch person who rides a bicycle every day – did not see myself as an expert. Cycling was something I just did, a second nature, and I had no idea how I exactly learned it as a child, let alone how to teach an adult. At that (pre-World Wide Box 4.1. Halima's experience.

HALIMA (± 1954)

"I learned to cycle, speak Dutch and cook, and I have tried to gain my place here, but I am still a stranger."

(arrived in the Netherlands in 1973,
raised in Casablanca, Morocco)

In that period I had good contacts with another neighbour, Mr Prins. She often shouted out of the window: "Hé, Halima! Stop what you're doing and come outside with the children!" She taught me to bicycle. At first I practised on the street, but people were staring at me too much, I did not want that any more. I took my children to a meadow nearby and that is how I learned to cycle. By falling and getting up again. Once I could do that Mrs Prins suggested to make long cycling tours, along farms and meadows. In the beginning I was ashamed as I was swinging on the road, but Mrs Prins said: "You should not worry about that!", and that is what I did. It was wonderful. One day she said: "Tomorrow we will take the bicycle into the city!" I was shocked. The city was far too chaotic for me. Mrs Prins calmed me: "You have to try it once or twice, and the fear will disappear" I had nightmares about traffic accidents and once we started to ride I was afraid I would not make it alive. A truck rode behind me. I was so scared, I got stuffy, but I said to myself: "Persist, Halima!" Since then I was bold enough to cycle past buses and cars. Soon after I went everywhere by bicycle.

Author's Translation from Dutch, original in Hanina Ajarai and Marjolijn van Heemstra, "Land van werk en honing; verhalen van Marokkaanse moeders over hun migratie", *Bulaaq*, 2006, pp. 122,

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Web) time, we had hardly any training materials, apart from a few old bicycles and we had no documented teaching method. As it turned out, this was pioneering work in which I was able to combine my passion for teaching and learning, with stimulating and supporting women from all over the world to overcome all sorts of barriers to cycling. For several years it became my personal journey to figure out good quality and fun methods, materials and an organisational system in which adult women could be taught the ability to ride our streets (van der Kloof, 2009).

The first thing we as cycling teachers had to do, was to become conscious of the fact that we were *unconsciously competent* in cycling for daily transport. Back in 1950 Maslow described his famous four stages of learning, as shown in Figure 4.1.

	Incompetence	Competence
Conscious	2 - CONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE	3 - CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE
Unconscious	1 - UNCONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE	4 - UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE

Figure 4.1. Maslow's four stages of learning.

At stage one, someone is not conscious of what they do not know. For example, someone who comes from a village in the mountains where nobody uses the bicycle might not be conscious of the fact that he/she does not know how to ride it. The beginners in the cycling courses can be located in stage two. They are aware that they do not know how to ride the bicycle. During the course they learn the ability to ride, leading to stage three. After they have been riding for a while, the required movements become second nature and they no longer have to think about it consciously. In other words, they have reached

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stage four. Teachers and trainers should transcend the fourth phase and be conscious of their unconscious competences in order to understand what their abilities are, what they know and how that fits into the specific context. It will help them when attempting to transfer skills and knowledge to others.

In knowledge management, the term "tacit knowledge" is used to talk about this kind of unconscious knowledge. It is difficult to explain this knowledge to others, in comparison with explicit knowledge. The term was introduced in philosophy by Michael Polanyi who stated that "we know more than we can tell" (1966, p. 4) and interestingly enough his most famous example of tacit knowledge is the ability to ride a bicycle.

If I know how to ride a bicycle ..., this does not mean that I can tell how I manage to keep my balance on a bicycle ... I may not have the slightest idea of how I do this, or even an entirely wrong or grossly imperfect idea of it, and yet go on cycling ... merrily. Nor can it be said that I know how to bicycle ... and yet do not know how to co-ordinate the complex pattern of muscular acts by which I do my cycling. ... I both know how to carry out (this performance) as a whole and also know how to carry out the elementary acts which constitute (it), although I cannot tell what these acts are (1966, p. 4).

We often take this knowledge for granted and it can only be transferred "through practice in a particular context and transmitted through social networks" (Schmidt, 1993). It requires personal contact, regular interaction and trust to transfer this knowledge: a very relevant observation when thinking about teaching an adult to ride a bicycle.

Materials and Methods

In the Centre for Immigrant Women in Tilburg, learning to cycle was not seen as an aim in itself. To us, cycling was a means of integration and emancipation for women who took the lessons. We saw that the ability to use the bicycle helped them to:

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- adapt to the local usages and modes of transportation;
- broaden their mobility;
- enhance their sense of equality and;
- enhance their sense of freedom.

Therefore it is clear that cycling is a tool for more equal participation in Dutch society (van der Kloof, 2013). And if the process of learning to ride a bicycle is to contribute to participation and emancipation, more than just teaching the mechanics of bicycling is required (Wolters 2011). The learners were the starting point in all the materials developed, both in the materials for learning the rules of traffic for cyclists (see van der Kloof 1996) and in the materials offering a teaching method for practical cycling skills (see van der Kloof, 2002).

Groups of learners are usually very diverse in age (from 15 to 60), educational level (from illiterate to professor), daily occupation (usually a mix of housewives and working women), having children or not, socio-economic background and experiences in traffic and public space in general. Typically, a teacher is assisted by one or two volunteers to teach a group of 6 to 12 women.

Some of the starting points for the teaching method for practical cycling skills are that:

- Learning the movements of cycling can be done in tiny steps. Each tiny new step is worth applauding and boosts self esteem.
- The learner has to learn herself: by watching, listening, trying and making mistakes. There is no need to hold the learner back.
- Each person has a preferred learning style and pace. Trainers must adapt to the personal style of the learner.

Fear is the number one constraint in learning to ride a bicycle. There are the obvious fears, such as falling, damaging a car or being hit by a car. But there are also fears of the consequences of an accident. Who will do the cooking, washing and bring the children to school if you break your leg?

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The materials that we developed to support the learning of traffic rules for cyclists are based on the following:

- The image is the most important feature in communicating the core message. The text only supports the image.
- All images have a cyclist with a yellow jacket as a reference point.
- Explanations of traffic regulations should be made straightforward and clear; one rule at a time and starting at the most basic level.
- The text is written as a series of short active instructions, dealing with concrete actions that suit the situation on the image. For example: “Cycle on the right side of the road” and “The traffic light is red. You must stop”.

All materials and methods have been developed while working with colleagues and participants in the courses, and learning from experiences elsewhere. The open and collaborative approach enabled us to create an atmosphere in which it was possible to talk about what made it fun to learning to cycle as an adult, what constraints were being faced and find out how we could give support to overcome these barriers.

Teaching New Skills, Meeting Unknown Constraints

I thought that learning to ride a bicycle was too late for me.

Leïla Schraa

Former participant in bicycle lessons, who became a cycling teacher.

Box 4.2. Leïla’s experience.

An interesting concept that helps categorize and understand what exactly needs to be learned and which constraints might pop up when adults start to learn to ride a bicycle is the term “motility” introduced by Kaufmann, (2004). He defines motility as the capacity of persons, goods and information to be mobile

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in social and geographic space. In other words, the potential mobility a person has, given who they are and where they are. Motility recognizes that actual or potential mobility may be realized differently or have different consequences across varying socio-cultural contexts. A person's motility consists of three elements, illustrated by Figure 4.1. *Access* refers to mobility options in time and place; the actual options and conditions in the specific socio-cultural context. Examples are access to a means of transportation like public transport, a car or a bicycle. *Competence* includes skills and abilities that enable a person to make use of particular transportation means. The last element is *appropriation*, which refers to how individuals, groups, networks or institutions interpret and act upon perceived or real access and skills. It relates to values and motives and describes how specific options are considered, deemed appropriate and either selected, or not. In Figure 4.2 the elements of the motility of a person are shown in relationship to the person's tacit knowledge and environment.

The following sections will explore the three elements, access, competence and appropriation in reverse order, because when we talk about women and cycling, appropriation dominates the other dimensions.

Appropriation is about values, motives and actual behaviour and is strongly linked with gender roles, age, ethnicity and regional differences. Motives expressed by non-native Dutch women for learning to ride a bicycle, are typically: to gain or regain quick and easy independent mobility; peer pressure; and health reasons. Other motives that have been mentioned are that one's children can cycle and a consequent desire to be able to ride with them, and a wish to adapt to local mobility habits. These motives derive from what men and women see in daily

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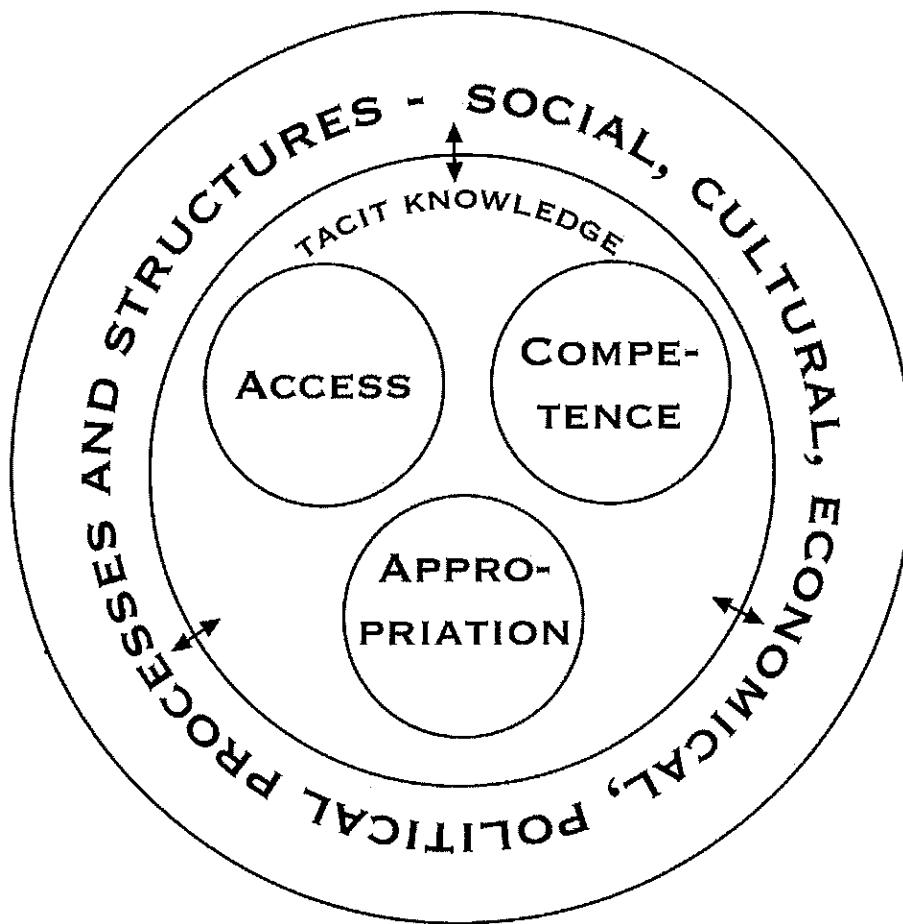


Figure 4.2. A person's motility in relation to tacit knowledge and the environment.

life in the Netherlands. Cycling is not the same thing as it was in their country of origin. It is safe and convenient. Men and women, young and old are seen on the bicycle every day. Bicycles feature in product advertising, in movies and books. The value given to the bicycle in the new homeland differs from that of the country of origin and habits are completely different. To see women on bicycles, to realise that they are proper women and nothing harmful happens to them through riding is a strong message. It becomes even more so as increasingly diverse people on bikes are seen, including, for example, women who wear visibly Muslim clothing. This does not automatically mean that it is easy or quick to overcome cultural barriers.

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Time, support, practice and a lot of perseverance are necessary when you've always been told that cycling is not a proper activity for girls and women, that women should wear dresses and these are not suitable for cycling and that you should not look people in the eye. Capacity is linked with confidence, self-esteem and the image of oneself and others (van der Kloof, Bastiaanssen & Martens, 2014).

As a specific example of these processes, I clearly remember one Turkish participant of a training course, in her forties. It took her quite a while to learn to balance, but finally she was confident enough and I cycled with her in quiet streets, which went perfectly. For the next four weeks she could not come to the lessons as she was on pilgrimage to Mecca; no problem. When she returned we had a long conversation in which a Turkish colleague participated as well. The woman explained that she had asked a religious advisor in Mecca whether it was proper for women to cycle, as she was not completely comfortable with it. She was looking for support. The advisor told her that it is better when women do not cycle; but for emergencies she could use the bicycle. My first reaction was disappointment; why had I given my time and energy to support her in learning to ride when she was so easily taken off the bicycle again by a religious advisor? My colleague however started to ask more questions and it became clear that the woman had no intention to quit cycling. She had thought about it a lot and said: "I do not live very far from my daughter, but it takes a lot of time to go there on foot. I often need to go there and for those emergencies I am allowed to cycle". This experience opened my eyes!

Many myths surround cycling in some social groups and these are also part of the (non-)appropriation. Some of the most frequently heard myths around cycling are "it is improper for girls and women", "it is too difficult for women to learn" and "it is only for sporty and very healthy people". These ideas have

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also circulated in western European societies since the 19th century. Especially (but not only) for women, uncertainty about the body and appearance in public space plays a role. This is often true for discussions around arriving at work being sweaty, wearing the wrong shoes or having a problem with hairstyle. Apart from that people just do not want to stand out from the norms of the group and do not want to be laughed at. When the norm is not to cycle, you need time, support, practice and a lot of perseverance to make a real change happen.

A highly relevant last aspect of appropriation is that it is shaped by needs, plans, aspirations and understandings of individuals, groups, networks and institutions. In many families, it is not routine to ask each member what their personal needs, plans and aspirations are, or how they understand the world. When you are a member of a group with a collectivist orientation (as compared to an individualist orientation) your actual personal behaviour is shaped not only, or not at all, by your own needs, plans, aspirations and understandings. Instead, it serves the needs, plans, aspirations and understandings of the group. This leads to an attitude in which women are used to let priorities of others prevail. For example, this may result in a situation in which the woman in the household does not have a strong say over finances. Therefore, the need to buy a suitable bicycle is overruled by other priorities in the family. Similarly, if a family member drops by, exactly at the time of the bicycle lesson, hospitality will prevail over the personal need to learn to ride.

Competence is about the physical ability to move and the skills acquired. Within this we also have to understand the place of licences, permits, rules and regulations of movement that shape mobility on a structural level, as well as the personal knowledge required for wayfinding. Learning the very basic requirement for cycling may seem even too simple for the experienced rider. The first stage of competence is not to ride but

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to walk with the bicycle and to make sure we can do it without bruising our shins black and blue through hitting the pedals. Only then can balance and other basic skills be learned and practised. After acquiring those skills, it is time to practise riding in traffic. Some participants have hardly any experience in traffic and they have no experience with the speed of the bicycle and handling the vehicle.

Another field of competence is knowledge of the rules of the road for cyclists. The rules of the road in the countries where many of the participants come from, such as Morocco, Turkey, Iraq or countries in West Africa are very different from the rules in the Netherlands. Beyond the formal regulations lie unwritten rules: something even more difficult to teach. Wayfinding in your neighbourhood and beyond is an important competence when learning to ride a bicycle and starting to use it in your daily life. It is not self-evident that everybody has those competences. A substantial number of the participants have been in school for only a couple of years; some are illiterate, causing more than a lack of language competences. A typical constraint for some women is that they are not used to going to places on their own, and have not developed the wayfinding and navigational skills that come through experience.

Organisational skills are also importance competences, but are easily overlooked. Kaufmann talks, for example, about planning and synchronising activities. Adults who start a course need to plan around their existing daily pattern. For women with a job, with younger children, or with many children, this can be a substantial barrier, as, for example, childcare needs to be arranged. Once able to cycle, you then have to figure out and organise how to take the children with you on the bicycle or next to you. The last competences that should be considered are the knowledge and skills around the mechanics of the bicycle. Most women starting out lack the knowledge and skills to repair flat tyres and bike lights, not to mention more complicated technical

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issues that can arise when starting to use the bicycle for daily transportation (see Cox, "Women, Gendered Roles, Domesticity and Cycling in Britain 1930-1980" in this volume for a historical perspective on these competences).

Access refers to the options in time and place. In this case it refers to the availability of a bicycle, to services and to equipment. It is not just any bicycle that should be available; a comfortable bike to learn on and to use while you do not feel sufficiently safe must allow the rider to rest both feet on the ground at any given time. So the saddle should be low enough and the frame not too high. Unfortunately, with an average height of 1.68 metres Dutch women are amongst the tallest women in the world, compared to women from Italy (1.65), Turkey (1.62), Brazil (1.59), India (1.52) and Philippines (1.50). These few centimetres matter a lot. Dutch standard sizes for bicycles are too large (not only for beginners), making it more difficult and more expensive to find a suitable bicycle. Smaller frame bicycles rarely appear second hand.

The following provides a surprising but real example of how standardisation in bicycle sizes can be an unexpected barrier to access a suitable bicycle. A young woman, in her early twenties, participated in the bicycle lessons. She did very well and we were keen to push her to acquire her own bicycle. For weeks her response was negative and we could not understand why, until one day she told us her dilemma. When she arrived in the Netherlands her husband, a second generation immigrant born and raised in the Netherlands, had bought her a bicycle and from day one it had been standing new and shiny in the shed, waiting to be used. It was a wedding gift and it looked beautiful. The only problem was that it was a standard size bicycle and didn't fit her. To explain to the husband why his wedding gift was not as perfect as it looked was a very delicate task.

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Another element of access is service provision, in particular, parking. A substantial portion of the non-Dutch women live in neighbourhoods lacking safe parking space for bicycles near their homes. Access to equipment is about having a child seat, panniers and other accessories generally used in the Netherlands. In order to have access you need to have information about the equipment, to know where to buy it and to determine what constitutes good quality (and therefore usability). In all these aspects lack of language skills forms a big barrier. This kind of information is typically not available in multiple languages, if it is written at all. Even if you have all the information, you also need the money to buy the equipment.

By zooming in to the three elements of motility, several social, cultural and economic factors that influence access, competence and appropriation can be identified. As participants in the courses have diverse backgrounds, the daily practice of bicycle lessons demonstrates a wide diversity of social, cultural and economic factors at play. The political context, however, is the same for the group as a whole and forms the subject of the final part of the chapter.

The Politics of Bicycle Lessons

Over the years the political framework required for the provision of bicycle lessons has turned out to be complex and tightly linked with finances (van den Langenberg, n.d.). Organisations and initiatives offering cycling courses need funding to buy bicycles that can be used during the lessons, to rent a space for meeting up, to have a budget for bicycle repair, reward volunteers involved and sometimes to hire staff to organize and/or run the lessons. As described, the potential participants tend to be women with few resources, so courses must be considered to involve minimal financial contributions from participants. Typically, personal contributions are between €1.00 to €2.50 per lesson. In many cases local government funds part of the remaining costs, complemented by contributions

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from other funds or sponsors. For the organisations and people involved, this is not just about the money. To get basic funding from the local government is to get moral support. And it is exactly this moral support that a growing group of political leaders do not want to give.

Years before the financial crisis, populist politicians began to attract media attention with anti-immigrant propaganda. They stated for example that financial support from governments for separate activities for immigrant women should be stopped, and bicycle lessons and swimming lessons were used as typical examples. In an interview in *Contrast* a magazine around integration issues (Coronel, 2002, n.p.), an expert in migration studies argued against the subsidized cycling lessons. He argued that cycling lessons should be open for everyone. "Outside of their own circles, in society, they will have to adapt to applicable rules". Yet at the same time in February 2002, a booklet commissioned by the Minister for Urban and Integration Policies with examples of successful integration and emancipation projects was published. One of the 27 described examples was the cycling course in Tilburg: "A cycling course proves to be a simple and successful step towards a life outside of the household" (Amrit Consultancy, 2002, p. 119).

Another round of negative populist attention arose after the start of the financial crisis. Major cuts in welfare programs were made all over the country and many initiatives for bicycle lessons had to scale down. This was not for lack of potential participants (the wish to learn to cycle continues) but simply because of a lack of financial means and support within welfare organizations, forced to narrow the focus of their provision. The Centre for Immigrant Women in Tilburg managed to keep the moral and financial support of the local government for its lessons until recently, anchored in a collaboration between the local bicycle policy and the welfare policy. Eventually, however,

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the Centre also had to face political reality. The populist party screened all provincial budgets, looking for projects that were specifically aimed at immigrants, and asked questions about the bicycle lessons in Tilburg. The lessons were part of the total traffic safety budget from the province to the municipality. Even though this populist party was not part of the coalition, there was a lack of political support within the coalition on the provincial level which led to a total cut of the budget. So it is important to note that such programmes are also shaped by forces outside of their own criteria for success or failure.

Conclusion

Non-Dutch women want to overcome social, economic and cultural barriers to cycling within the context of a tumultuous political climate. With the time and support of their family, neighbours, teachers and volunteers, many of them have managed to appropriate the bicycle and make it part of their daily lives, as we see from the statistics. Close scrutiny of the factors that play a role in acquiring the necessary skills for cycling access, competences and appropriation – makes it clear that although cycling infrastructure in the Netherlands may be gender neutral, the use and image of the bicycle are not. From my own perspective as a trainer, I hope that all inhabitants in the Netherlands and elsewhere can gain access to cycling. But this requires both the building of high quality infrastructure *and* appropriate projects and courses in which people can participate in order to gain the skills and competences needed to fully utilise the bicycle.

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