

Bikes and Belonging

A photographic exploration of the Bike Host program in Toronto
by Yvonne Verlinden

Bikes and Belonging:

**A Photographic Exploration of the
Bike Host Program in Toronto**

by

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Hons. BA, Western University, 2010

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Abstract

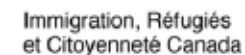
This major research project uses photography to explore questions of mobility, place-learning and belonging with newcomers participating in the Bike Host program in Toronto. Created by CultureLink Settlement Services in 2011, Bike Host loans bicycles out to immigrants and refugees and matches them with a cycling mentor. Through small group rides and large events, the participants have the opportunity to explore Toronto, gain confidence riding, make social connections, practice English and engage in volunteerism. For this project, a dozen participants also took pictures of how they were using their bicycles and shared their photos in small group, semi-structured discussions, which were recorded and analyzed. Four themes emerged: freedom, comfort and knowledge, discovery and belonging. The photographers found that compared to walking, they could travel further more quickly and with less effort, which prompted them to make more trips within their communities. The photographers also appreciated that, unlike with transit, they could leave whenever they wanted and take whichever route they wanted. This new mobility led to discovery, in both guided group rides to iconic Toronto destinations and in neighbourhood meanderings, undertaken independently along local streets and trails. Through this process, they filled in the gaps in their local cognitive maps. Increased familiarity led to an increased sense of belonging, as places that were once unfamiliar began to feel more like home.



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Introduction

How do we get to know a new place? How do we become familiar with its landmarks, monuments and important districts, and also its quiet streets, back alleys and informal paths? Its grocery stores, libraries, and community centres? While these more mundane places may not be interesting to a visitor, they can be vital to someone who has just moved to a city, particularly from another country, as they seek to fill essential needs, access support networks, and learn about economic opportunities (McKeary & Newbold, 2010). More than these practical aspects, though, creating an 'image of the city' (Lynch, K., 1960) in our minds helps turn unfamiliar places into places we call home. We can begin by feeling uncomfortable in an environment which is strange to us, but through our everyday tasks and the routes we regularly travel, we gradually become privy to the local memory and knowledge base that residents share, and through this process of place-learning, build a sense of belonging (Williamson, 2016).

Local travel is a key component of this process; we gather knowledge while en route, whether by gazing out the window of a bus, or strolling down the sidewalk and peering into shops. How we travel affects the depth of knowledge that we gain. For example, driving allows the traveler to reach destinations which are farther

afield, but provides very little opportunity to interact with people or places along the way. Public transit is limited to a set route, restricting place-learning to locations along a single corridor. Walking, on the other hand, provides a completely immersive experience in which the traveler is exposed to all elements of the environment, but it is limited in its reach (te Brömmelstroet, Nikolaeva, Glaser, Skou Nicolaisen, & Chan, 2017; Mondschein, Blumenberg, & Taylor, 2010).

Cycling provides a balance between interaction and transportation. Like the pedestrian, the cyclist is immersed in the urban sensescape of sights, sounds, smells and textures (Van Duppen & Spierings, 2013); however, the cyclist is able to travel further and experience a greater diversity of places (te Brömmelstroet et al., 2017). Cycling is also independent, in that the traveler has full control over the choice of route. Engaging in this wayfinding process helps build an increasingly detailed cognitive map, which travelers who are passengers on transit or in a vehicle miss (Golledge, 1999; Mondschein et al., 2010).

This project explores the bicycle as a tool in the process of place-learning for newcomers (immigrants and refugees) in Toronto. It specifically looks at Bike Host, a program run by CultureLink Settlement

and Community Services, which loans bicycles to newcomers for the summer and pairs them with a mentor. Together, mentor and mentees participate in large events and small group rides to explore the city, practice language skills, make social connections, and engage in volunteerism. In 2016, a number of participants captured how they were using their bicycles through photography and reflected on the connections between travel, place-learning, and belonging. This report shares their experiences.



Toronto's Context

The City of Toronto's motto, "Diversity, Our Strength," exemplifies its pride in being one of the most multi-cultural cities in the world. Fifty-one per cent of Toronto residents were born outside of Canada, and their countries of origin are wide-ranging (City of Toronto, 2013), thanks to a shift in immigration policy in the 1970's that ended preferential treatment for European countries in favour of a merit-based points system (Murdie & Ghosh, 2010). Torontonians today name over 160 languages as mother tongues (City of Toronto, 2012).

With such a multi-faceted population, Toronto can be characterized as super-diverse - that is, a place where diversity is perceived as a normal part of everyday life, and "simple visible difference does not imply knowledge about the other person's actual place of origin, socio-economic background, migration history, etc" (Wessendorf, 2010). In such places, navigating daily interactions calls for a certain level of intercultural competency (Wessendorf, 2010).

Compared to many immigrant-receiving cities, Toronto has a strong system of support services in place, including government-sponsored language learning and settlement help (Siemiatycki

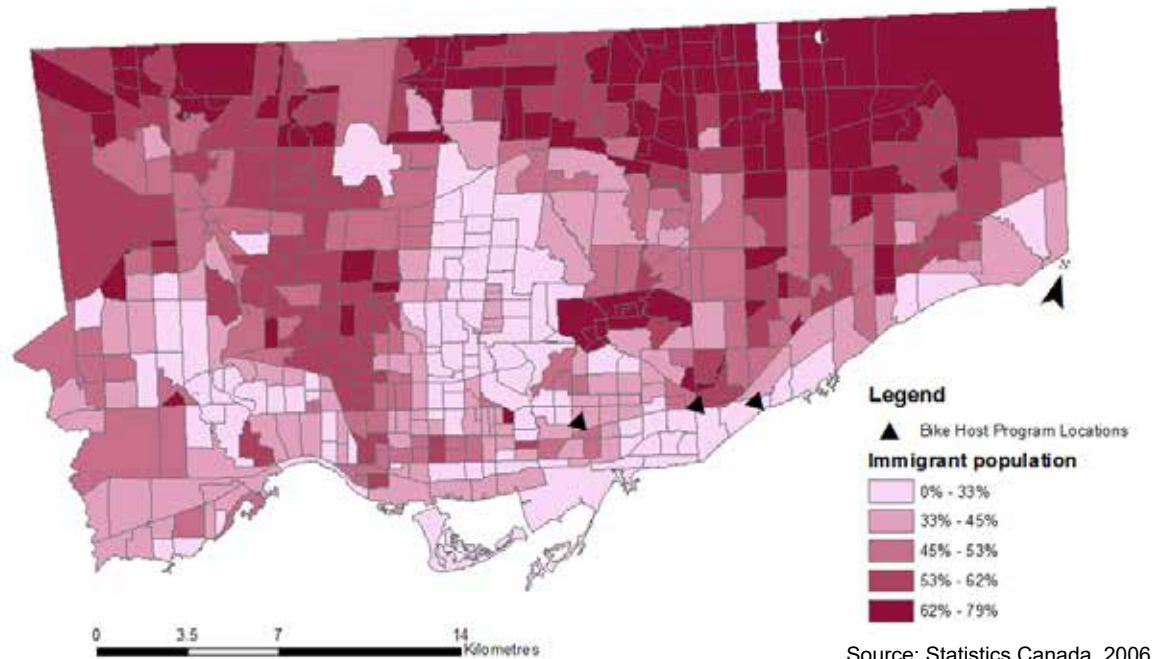
& Triadafilopoulos, 2010). Yet, many immigrants are struggling. Well-paid, unionized manufacturing jobs that immigrants from Europe often held pre-1980s have mostly disappeared (Murdie & Ghosh, 2010). The points system recruits immigrants with more resources and higher levels of education, but a lack of recognition of international credentials means that often these individuals cannot find work in their fields (Murdie & Ghosh, 2010).

Housing patterns have also shifted. Traditionally immigrants settled first in ethnic enclaves in Toronto's city centre and moved out to the suburbs as their resources increased. However, as downtown neighbourhoods gentrify, immigrants are by-passing these original reception areas. Those with wealth are moving directly to newer suburbs, while the less affluent are settling in high rise rental apartments in the post-war inner suburbs, located in the northeast and northwest of the city (Lo, Shalaby, Alshalalfah, 2011). In 1971, immigrants made up 35% of the population in downtown neighbourhoods, and 31% in the inner suburbs. In 2006, 28% of residents downtown were immigrants, while in the inner suburbs, the immigrant population nearly doubled

Distribution of Immigrants in Toronto

(Hulchanski, 2010). These patterns mirror trends in average income in both these areas, as downtown neighbourhoods become wealthier and new immigrants with fewer resources seek affordable housing on the city's edges (Hulchanski, 2010).

Despite these challenges, the discourse of Canada as an open, diverse and welcoming nation persists. Recently, this rhetoric, combined with the timing of a federal election and widespread public outcry over the conditions suffered by Syrians fleeing war, led to a commitment from the incoming government to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees between October 2015 and February 2016, and an additional 10,000 by the end of 2016 (Bélanger McMurdo, 2016). This influx of refugees stretched the capacities of settlement services, which typically receive a total of 10,000 refugees over the course of a year (Bélanger McMurdo, 2016). Both the public and private sectors, as well as individuals, played a heightened role in responding to the unmet needs, through volunteering, raising funds and donating goods. For example, in Toronto, the Community Foundation of Canada (CFC) partnered with Manulife Financial and CN Rail to create a Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees, which provided rent



Source: Statistics Canada, 2006

supplements to address a serious housing gap (City of Toronto, 2016). Individuals, religious groups and community organizations went even further and sponsored Syrian refugees directly through the “Group of Five” scheme, which states that five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents may sponsor refugees to come to Canada, provided they take responsibility for supporting them for one year after their arrival (Bélanger McMurdo, 2016). By November 2016, over 36,000 Syrian refugees had arrived in Canada

through these various avenues. Twenty-one per cent settled in Toronto, and over half of these were privately sponsored (Government of Canada, 2016). The 2016 edition of Bike Host, its sixth summer of programming, took place against this backdrop of heightened civic awareness and compassion for the struggles faced by newcomer arrivals to Canada.

Bike Host Photography Project

In 2016, Bike Host had an east Toronto focus and was offered for the first time in an inner suburb. The program was launched from two new community bike hubs in Scarborough, which were opened under the leadership of the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation through their Scarborough Cycles project. The bike hubs were located at two community organizations: the Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre and AccessPoint on Danforth. Bike Host was also offered at a third location, the Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre, through a partnership with the South Riverdale Community Health Centre.

Since 2013, the Toronto Cycling Think & Do Tank has researched Bike Host as part of a larger undertaking looking at behaviour change and how programming can effectively encourage the adoption of cycling as a mode of transportation. As part of the 2016 edition of Bike Host, this photography project was added to gain qualitative insights into the unique intersection of cycling and newcomers.

A group of Bike Host participants explored how access to a bicycle can have a

positive impact on mobility and a sense of community belonging. Following the approval of the research design by the Ryerson Research Ethics Board, 12 newcomers were recruited from among the 22 mentors and 55 mentees participating in the Bike Host program. The group was made up of seven men and five women, whose ages ranged from 25 to 46. They had lived in many different countries, including: Iran, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan, Australia, Russia, the Netherlands, Britain, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Greece, and the United States. For most of the group, Canada was the third, fourth, or fifth country they had lived in. Half of the photographers currently lived within a couple of kilometres of a Bike Host program location; the rest were dispersed across the city. All were able to ride a bike, although a few had not ridden since adolescence.

The project used photography as a way to document participants' use of their loaned bicycles and as a prompt to talk about the connections between place, travel and belonging. Researchers have found visual methods useful for uncovering the

physical and emotional aspects of place and belonging (Raffaetà & Duff, 2013). The participants were given a number of photographic prompts and took pictures over the span of a couple of weeks. They then shared their photos in semi-structured group discussions. The participants interpreted their photos, and talked about their cycling experience and its relation to their sense of belonging. These conversations were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A number of themes came up often and were common across the discussions, namely: freedom, comfort and knowledge, discovery, and belonging. The following pages share, in words and pictures, the photographers' reflections around these ideas. The insights of the photographers are followed by further research on each theme from outside sources. Note some photographers chose to receive credit for their work, and others preferred to remain anonymous. Quotes and pictures are not necessarily from the same person. Speakers have been identified only by the regions they have lived in, to preserve anonymity (Statistics Canada, 2015a).





Freedom

Independent, unrestricted mobility. For many of the photographers, the bicycle removed transportation challenges and put trip decision-making in their hands. As only four members of the group had access to a car (access which they shared with other family members), the photographers' typical travel choices were mostly limited to transit and walking, modes which they said had their own frustrations and limitations. Using their bicycles, they were able to access places more easily and on their own terms.

The photographers described a myriad of destinations visited and tasks accomplished with their bicycles, including picking up take-out, getting groceries, visiting friends, going to places of worship, attending festivals, and sending money to relatives. Most of these destinations were close to home, and used to be reached by walking. In comparison to cycling, though, the photographers said that walking was time-consuming and fatiguing. Some described making more frequent trips into the community because travel was substantially quicker and easier with the bicycle.

The photographers also spoke significantly of the freedom of bicycle travel as compared to travel by transit. They enjoyed being able to leave whenever they liked and to follow whatever route they liked.

They found that often travel times were the same or less by bike.

Some of the photographers were able to commute to work by bike. One even reported taking on more volunteer work opportunities because of having a bike. For others, however, a variety of factors stood in the way: work was too far away or too variable in location, or too many tools were required for their job. Some expressed a desire to commute to work by bike, but were unsure about how to dress or what route to take.



“Sometimes certain distances, you might think twice, “Oh, do I really have to go?” Now, if my wife asks me or if I feel I have to buy something, I just get on my bike and go and get it. That’s kind of a privilege to me, going about, certain distances are not a distance at all! I can do a lot more things.”

- Southern Asia



"You feel free. I can go when I want to go. If I have any job or anything, small job, like buy some groceries, go to the mosque, go around, visit a friend, I can use the bike. I don't have to wait for the TTC bus, which is sometimes late, sometimes doesn't come."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East

"I come around Canadian Tire, or Lowe's, or grocery stuff. Whenever I think that I can carry it on the bike, I always do that, even if it's five minutes, rather than walking."

- Southern Asia

"On weekdays, usually I go to the mosque by bike. The mosque, you know, there is a specific time for prayer, and sometimes I was late because if I want to walk, I have between 10 and 15 minutes. When I use the bike, two or three minutes - very useful. So I can arrive on time to the prayer. This is the best use for the bicycle - to go on time."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East



"I took this picture to represent that I used to ride a bus, and now I ride a bike. I wanted to represent independence or a kind of the freedom. People are dependent on the TTC, and instead of getting a TTC, they could get a bike, and they could go anywhere on time without wasting their time." - Southern Asia, Western Europe, Northern Europe

"I feel free, I can go on any route I want, any way I want to go. And not when I use a bus. A bus, there is just one way, go in it. On the bicycle, I feel free and portable, and also safe." - West Central Asia & the Middle East



“Having this bicycle from you, it actually changed my life. I actually was able to do a lot of voluntary works, because otherwise I wouldn’t be able to say yes to them. I would have worried about the walking distance. It’s 15 minutes each way, so, “No, I’ll feel lazy. I don’t want to go for the voluntary work.” But now I have the bike, I will need only 5 minutes, and it won’t be that much physical work for me, so I said yes to most of the voluntary work, and I felt good, and I’m getting a certificate for that, and that’s a very good thing for me. So it’s actually, all the credit goes to the bike.” - Southern Asia, Oceania

Mobility and Exclusion

For newcomers living in the inner suburbs, everyday mobility can be a challenge. The low density and dispersed nature of these neighbourhoods means that reliance on cars is greater than in downtown (Hulchanski, 2010), however, car ownership is not universal (Ledsham & Savan, 2017). Public transportation use for work commutes is actually higher in these suburbs than in downtown, despite less access to higher order transit such as subways (Hulchanski, 2010). As well, cycling infrastructure is far less than in the downtown and generally consists of off-road recreational trails which meander and which do not link to each other or to important destinations (Ledsham & Savan, 2017).

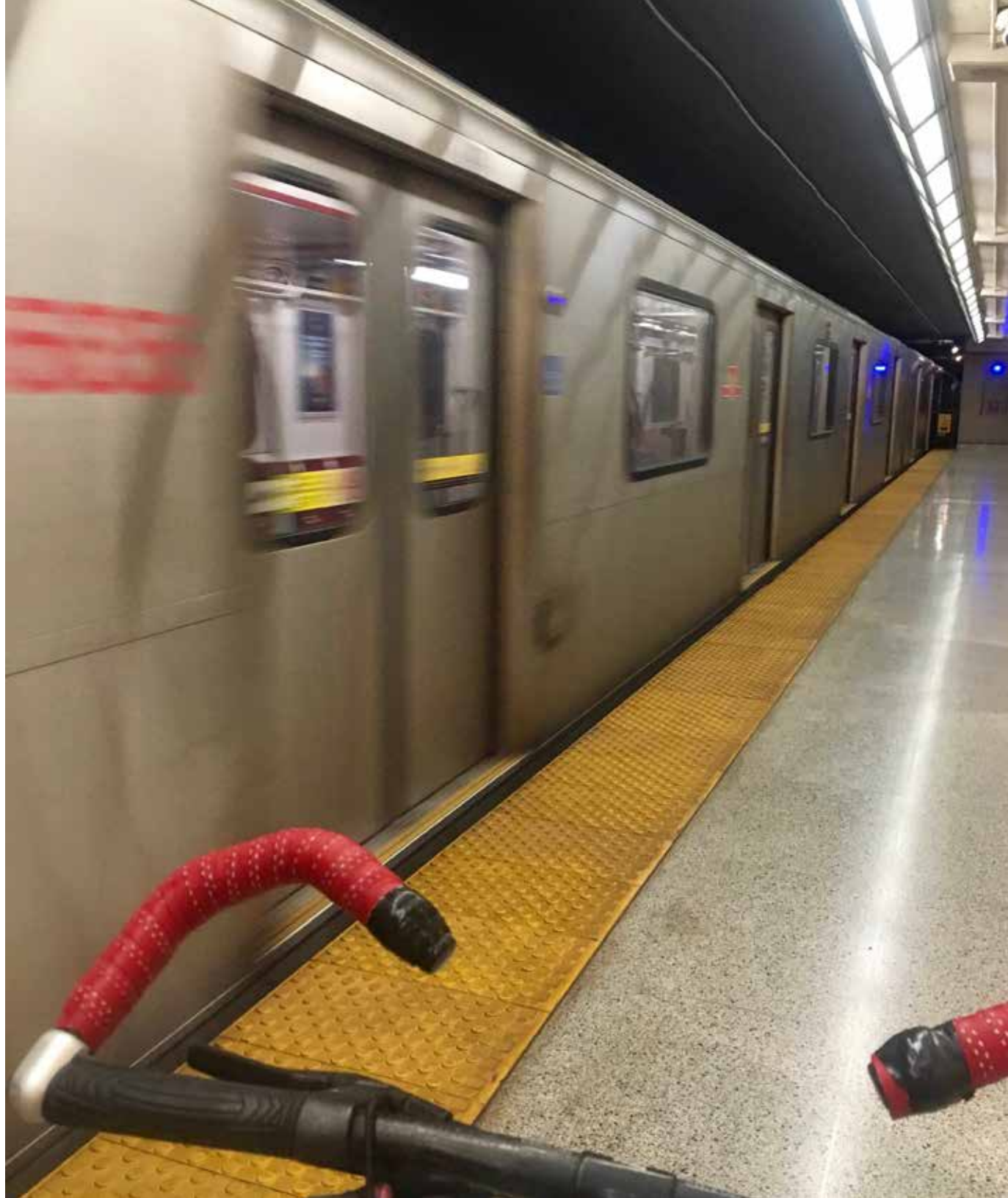
For newcomers specifically, many face a mobility gap due to the fact that their financial resources may be limited, a network of family support unavailable, and navigating an unfamiliar transportation system can be a challenge (McKeary & Newbold, 2010). Their higher reliance on transit (Heisz & Schellenberg, 2004) can be a burden in the inner suburbs, whose large distances, dispersed public institutions and infrequent service can result in isolation and negative consequences for health and social well-being (Basu, 2013; Lai, &

Hynie, 2010). Because the environment has been built around the assumption of high mobility, those with less freedom of transportation are prevented from participating fully in the social, economic and political life of the community because of a reduced ability to access it (Kenyon, Lyons & Rafferty, 2001).

It is important to look beyond a structural perspective, though, of simply what transportation infrastructure is in place. Differences in access exist between individuals, who possess different physical abilities, different restrictions on time and different levels of knowledge regarding opportunities, destinations, and routes (Kwan, & Weber, 2003; Cass, Shove, Urry, 2005). What services that might potentially be useful are being offered in the community? Where are they located and when are they available? How can they be reached? Two people living in the same neighbourhood can experience different levels of accessibility based on this type of local, spatial knowledge (Mondschein, Blumenberg, & Taylor, 2010). Newcomers in particular are often unaware of what is available outside of their settlement agency, including many services that could be helpful to them (Lai & Hynie, 2010). Moreover, discussions of

mobility often focus on the need to reach institutions, agencies, and employment locations to access opportunities for learning, health, settlement services, and jobs. The necessity of travel to maintain ties to family and friends, to gather with loved ones on special occasions, or to join a social network is often ignored (Cass, Shove, Urry, 2005). Because these trips generally occur on off-peak times and to less predictable destinations, transit service likely serves them far less effectively.

Despite the lack of cycling infrastructure in many of their neighbourhoods, the Bike Host photographers still found the bicycle to be an effective mode of transportation. Compared to their experiences walking and taking the bus, cycling was easier, often faster, and less restricted. In a few cases, photographers described an increased level of engagement with the community because accessing destinations was less taxing. For the most part, though, work locations were too far to be accessed by bike, or the need for tools and professional dress were viewed as complications. Overall, cycling was most effective in the local context, for short trips to everyday destinations.





Comfort and Knowledge

For all of the photographers, cycling was a familiar activity; they had ridden before, though some not since childhood. Their degree of comfort on Toronto's streets was related to their past experiences in other countries. Those who had lived in very crowded places with little or no cycling infrastructure felt safe here in Toronto, and found Toronto's streets well-organized and its drivers polite, while those who had lived in cities with strong cycling traditions and dedicated infrastructure felt it was unsafe to ride here on the streets.

In either case, though, the photographers held a strong positive association with cycling. A few indicated that they had been considering buying a bicycle this summer, before discovering Bike Host and the opportunity to try out riding in Toronto for free.

While generally comfortable on a bicycle, many photographers described gaining increased cycling skill and confidence through the program, as well as knowledge about the local environment and cycling customs.

The mentors were the most important source of information, explaining everything from routes to rules to how to load a bicycle on a bus. The photographers also learned from each other, from cycling

resources like Google Maps and the City of Toronto Cycling Map, and from watching other cyclists. Finally, they learned about themselves and what they were capable of, and they expressed pride about how far they had ridden and how much they had improved.



“Everything is organized here in Canada. Everything is safe. For the public, for the cars, for the bicycle, everything is organized. In my country, you can usually see that the people ride the bikes between the cars. So dangerous.”

- West Central Asia & the Middle East

“The city where I lived is really, really planned. They are well-planned for the cyclist, but here it’s not like that, you know. Here, it’s a bit scary to me.”

- Eastern Europe, Western Europe

"I was pretty comfortable, when I was riding the bike along the road here. I feel very safe here, in Toronto. They have a bike lane. I've never seen a bike lane in my country. There are lanes, but not a bike lane, you know."

- Southern Asia, North America, Western Europe





"Now this is the first time after being a teenager that I ride. And this is like direct memory, right from that age to this age, and such a connection! ...I felt comfortable right away. It's like part of me, the bicycle. It's like an extension of my arms and legs. It's like part of my body, as if I'm a centaur, a mythological creature."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East, Northern Europe

"I kind of wanted to test myself first because I didn't know whether I'll be able to bike for long, 20 mins, half hour, I didn't know myself. From the first day, we biked for half an hour, 45 minutes. And now, with my mentor's encouragement, I went 26 km, and it's about two and a half hours, in one go, without taking a break."

- Southern Asia

"I noticed I look at bicyclists more now. Everytime I walk anywhere, I look at bicycles, how they park it, how they lock it. I look at what bicyclists wear, what kind of helmets - there is their own fashion going there. I never looked at them, never. Now I look, how they turn to the right, to the left, and how they follow the rules."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East, Northern Europe

"I'm using the bike everyday on the weekdays to go to work, so the first time my mentor actually helped me to find the way."

- Southern Asia, Western Europe, Northern Europe

"Before we don't know the exact rules, but through this project, our mentor, she always told us, for example, you have not to ride the bike on the pedestrian area, you have to walk. So you learn more."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East



Newcomers and Cycling

Interestingly, research has shown that in North America, newcomers already travel by personal motor vehicle less, and cycle more than those who are born here, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors (Smart, 2010; Tal, & Handy, 2010). In particular, in the United States, immigrants who live in high density areas and have low incomes make 3% of all trips by bike - while this number is small, it is 10 times higher than the level for similarly situated, American-born residents (Smart, 2010).

Region of origin plays a critical role, with those from East and Southeast Asia having much higher odds of cycling when compared with native-born or other immigrant groups (Smart, 2010). Initial research into why newcomers drive less suggests that it may be due to residential location decisions, the inability to obtain a driver's license because of undocumented status, unfamiliar driving conditions, the increased expense of sending remittances home, and the availability of shared mobility services targeted to newcomer enclaves (Chatman & Klein, 2013). Over time, newcomers generally adopt driving habits similar to the rest of the population; however, for those from some countries,

the differences persist (Blumenberg, & Shiki, 2007; Chatman, 2014).

For the Bike Host photographers, previous cycling experiences did indeed influence their comfort level here in Toronto, although their narratives are more complicated than the research suggests. The newcomers identified primarily with their countries of birth, but most had lived in many places, for example, moving from Bangladesh, Iran or Nepal, to Australia, the Netherlands, or the United States, and then to Canada. In each of these places, they either cycled or did not, for a variety of different reasons, including topography, local conventions, access to a bicycle, traffic conditions, stage of life, and personal motivation. As people become increasingly mobile, there is a need for further research into these complex narratives of migration. This element is hard to capture, however, as the census and large-scale travel surveys, upon which most of the studies cited above depend, collect data on a single country of origin only.



The Importance of a Program

It is important to note that exposure to different people and places through cycling does not ensure that the experience will be positive. It may be that the interaction is an occasion to feel alienated or displaced, as much as to build belonging and social inclusion (Law, & Karnilowicz, 2015; te Brömmelstroet, et al., 2010; Williamson, 2016). An Australian study found that newcomers were afraid of looking “silly” (Law & Karnilowicz, 2015) and felt out of place while cycling because of differences in attitude, dress and equipment.

The Bike Host program is a mix of cycling for recreation and for transportation. Research from the field of recreation and sport has shown that if an initiative is looking to achieve social inclusion goals in addition to recreational ones, a carefully structured program is important (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Rich, Misener, & Dubeau, 2015; Schulenkorf & Edwards, 2012). The program should:

- (a) create multi-ethnic teams which enable cross-cultural interactions, while allowing people to feel comfortable being distinct;
- (b) combine large-scale events with regular participation at a smaller scale;

- (c) cultivate social opportunities and frame activities as non-competitive;
- (d) place importance on agency and involve participants in decision-making;
- (e) provide opportunities for participants to develop and display competence;
- (f) focus on children and youth (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Rich, Misener, & Dubeau, 2015; Schulenkorf & Edwards, 2012).

While the Bike Host program focuses on adults, rather than children and youth, its design otherwise meets the criteria outlined above. Newcomers are placed in multi-ethnic groups of two or three. Their mentor is tasked with creating a welcoming environment. These mentor-mentee groups meet regularly for rides around the city, while also participating occasionally in larger events organized by CultureLink. The program is social in nature, not competitive, and the top three benefits cited by participants are fun, health and exercise, and meeting new people (Culturelink, 2016). The program also seeks to provide participants with opportunities to take on leadership roles within the program and engage in volunteerism, in order to build

meaningful Canadian work experience. Finally, the program gives participants an opportunity to re-discover, refine, and re-value an often dis-used skill, which leads to a sense of pride and accomplishment. While Bike Host's framework is certainly not the only way to achieve these goals, those looking to replicate the program should carefully consider how best to incorporate these elements in their own contexts.



MA

s & Collection



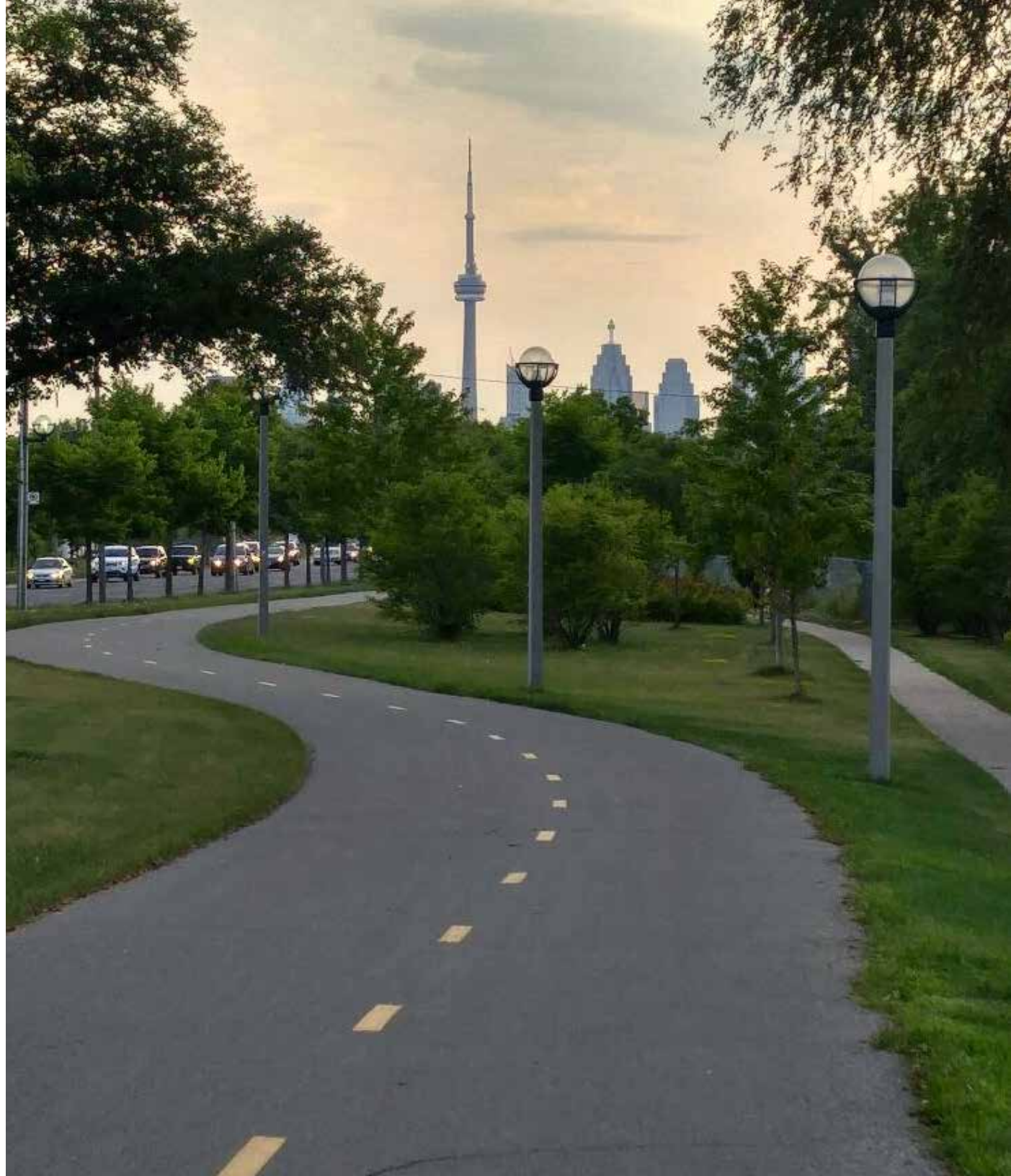
Discovery

A common theme throughout the photography discussions was the great pleasure of discovering Toronto. With their Bike Host mentors as guides, the photographers explored trails, parks, and neighbourhoods for the first time. Often these were prominent destinations in Toronto (Woodbine Beach, Cabbagetown, Tommy Thompson Park, the Don Valley etc.), but the mentor-mentee groups explored local parks and trail systems as well. Repeatedly, the photographers said that they had not known that these places and trail networks existed in Toronto. In some cases, they had lived for years in an apartment with a view overlooking a park, and not known there was a trail through it.

The photographers also set off on their own to explore, picking a trail or a street and riding its length, just to see where it ended up. With the ability to travel further than on foot, more freely than on transit, and more slowly than in a car, the photographers found they were able to see more and notice more of their surroundings. In this way, they discovered new parks, grocery stores, shops, and places of worship. Other times, they discovered nothing of particular significance, but the simple knowledge of where the street went was viewed as valuable in of itself.

*“Since I got bike, my
only dream was to
explore Toronto.”*

- Southern Asia, Western Europe,
Northern Europe



"I discovered new parks, I didn't know about them before. Also, I discovered some new mosques, I didn't know about them before. New grocery stores, like Food Basic and Metro, around my home.. now I know a lot them."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East



"I ride almost everyday, especially in the afternoon, just to explore the neighbourhood."

- Southern Asia, Oceania



"I discovered that there's a Nepalese restaurant. I never knew there was a Nepalese restaurant over there. I met the Nepalese guy who's the owner. It was good. Nice experience."

- Southern Asia, Western Europe, Northern Europe

“Almost everyday, I saw something new when I went outside with my bicycle. When we walk, we don’t go that far away. You usually want to get to your destination, and you go there everyday. But when you ride, I think something happened, it was telling me “Go further. Let’s see something more. Let’s go far and see if you can explore something more.” If I didn’t ride a bicycle, I wouldn’t get that.”

- Southern Asia, Oceania

“That’s a leisurely way to see Toronto, on a bike. Because otherwise, you’re put on a bus or car, you zoom by things, you know. I got to discover a lot more stores around Danforth.”

- Southern Asia



"We didn't have any destination, we just say, "Ok, today we will go this way, and we will see how far we can go." We would just go Birchmount Road today, or Victoria Park Road today, or the Danforth Road today, or the Waterfront Trail today."

- Southern Asia, Oceania

"I have more of an understanding of my area now than I had before because I'm going with my bike now, into the streets... In my area, there's just buildings and concrete, but still I found I got know my area better now. I know where the street takes me if I go left."

- Southern Asia, North America, Western Europe



Traveling and Mapping

Cognitive mapping, a term coined by Tolman (1948), refers to the creation and internal storage of knowledge about neighbourhood routes and personally important locations. In a new or unfamiliar area, a person's cognitive map will be fragmented, likely organized in strips or corridors around a few well-traveled routes. As the person continues to have further travel and wayfinding experiences, these gaps are filled in (Golledge, 1999), with varying levels of detail depending on the mode of travel (Mondschein et al., 2009; te Brömmelstroet et al., 2017).

For example, traveling by car allows the discovery of destinations which are farther afield and which may be difficult to reach otherwise (te Brömmelstroet et al., 2017). For the driver, the element of way-finding, aided now by GPS, contributes to the process of creating a cognitive map of the area (Mondschein et al., 2009). However, the opportunity for exposure to places along the route is very low; inside a car, "the sights, sounds, tastes, temperatures and smells of the city are reduced to the two-dimensional view through the car windscreen" (Sheller & Urry, 2000).

Transit as a mode may provide increased opportunities to interact with fellow

travelers, but it also cocoons passengers, at times even underground, and limits interactions with place to the view through the window, or to stops and transfer points (te Brömmelstroet et al., 2017). Public transit is also limited to a set route, and takes much of the way-finding task away from the traveler, restricting the knowledge gained from the trip to locations along a single corridor (Mondschein et al., 2017).

Cycling, by contrast, is a mode which involves the full body in the experience of transportation. The cyclist is exposed to the urban sensescape of sights, sounds, smells and textures and is intimately aware of the effect of the city's topography on the effort to move (Van Duppen, & Spierings, 2013, Spinney, 2006). The pace of travel by bicycle allows the cyclist to reach further destinations than is possible by walking, while still being conducive to frequent stops and sight-seeing (te Brömmelstroet et al., 2010). As an independent mode, it puts the power of route choice in the hands of the traveler, who builds an increasingly detailed cognitive map through the process of wayfinding (Golledge, 1999). Finally, cycling also has considerable health benefits (Götschi, Garrard, & Giles-Corti, 2016), and commuters who travel by bike often say it is an enjoyable part of their day

that they look forward to (Aldred, 2015).

Walking likewise immerses the traveler in the world around them, and provides many opportunities for interaction with both people and places. Pedestrians are “exposed to their surrounding environment without restriction. They can read the city like a textured surface” (te Brömmelstroet et al., 2010: 9). The sphere of exposure is limited, however, by the distance an individual can comfortably walk and by the walkability of the neighbourhood; increased walking trips are closely connected to density, proximity of non-residential destinations, and land use mix (Saelens & Handy, 2008). People in these types of mixed use, walkable neighbourhoods have been found to be more likely to know their neighbours, participate politically, trust others, and be socially engaged than those living in car-oriented suburbs (Leyden, 2003).

The Bike Host photographers similarly emphasized the particularities of cycling as a travel mode. Those who did have access to a car compared the two traveling experiences, and found that for the purposes of discovering one’s neighbourhood, the bicycle was preferable. Others pointed out that many of the



locations they visited were not accessible by transit. A new idea which surfaced in the discussions is the idea that the bicycle, by its nature, encourages exploration. While the conversation did not elaborate on how, the ease of movement and the great flexibility of route choice may have an influence.



Belonging

The combined effect of increased access through improved mobility within their communities and increased local knowledge through independent and group exploration led to a deeper sense of belonging for the photographers. In discussions, they described feeling their neighbourhoods shift from strange to familiar places and how much more they felt at home. This change was not restricted to those who were newly arrived, but held true even for those who had been living in Toronto for three or four years already. When discussing what had caused this shift, the photographers rarely cited their visits to well-known, beautiful Toronto locations. Rather, the local element seemed to be more important, and the knowledge of where shops were located and where roads went contributed significantly to making the neighbourhood feel more comfortable.



"I've been here for four years, but I never felt so much as if I belong to this society....When you bike, you know places, you notice more, you see more. And then, because you know the city, and sometimes more than a citizen of the city, you feel like you belong equally as those people who've been living here a long time."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East,
Northern Europe

"I feel very comfortable because I feel like I know everything. It's like my country because when I came to Canada, I felt everything is not comfortable, strange, everything is strange. But now I feel everything is comfortable for me, it's like my home. Like back home."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East

"Personally, I feel so much closer to the city, to people. I feel like I belong more to the community. To people. To Canadians. I don't know. Maybe because in my home country, we don't bike. We don't ride bicycles at all.... I feel like I'm part of a biking community now."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East,
Northern Europe





"I would say that it promoted my mobility, and when my mobility was more than before, my engagement with the society was more than before."

- Southern Asia, Oceania

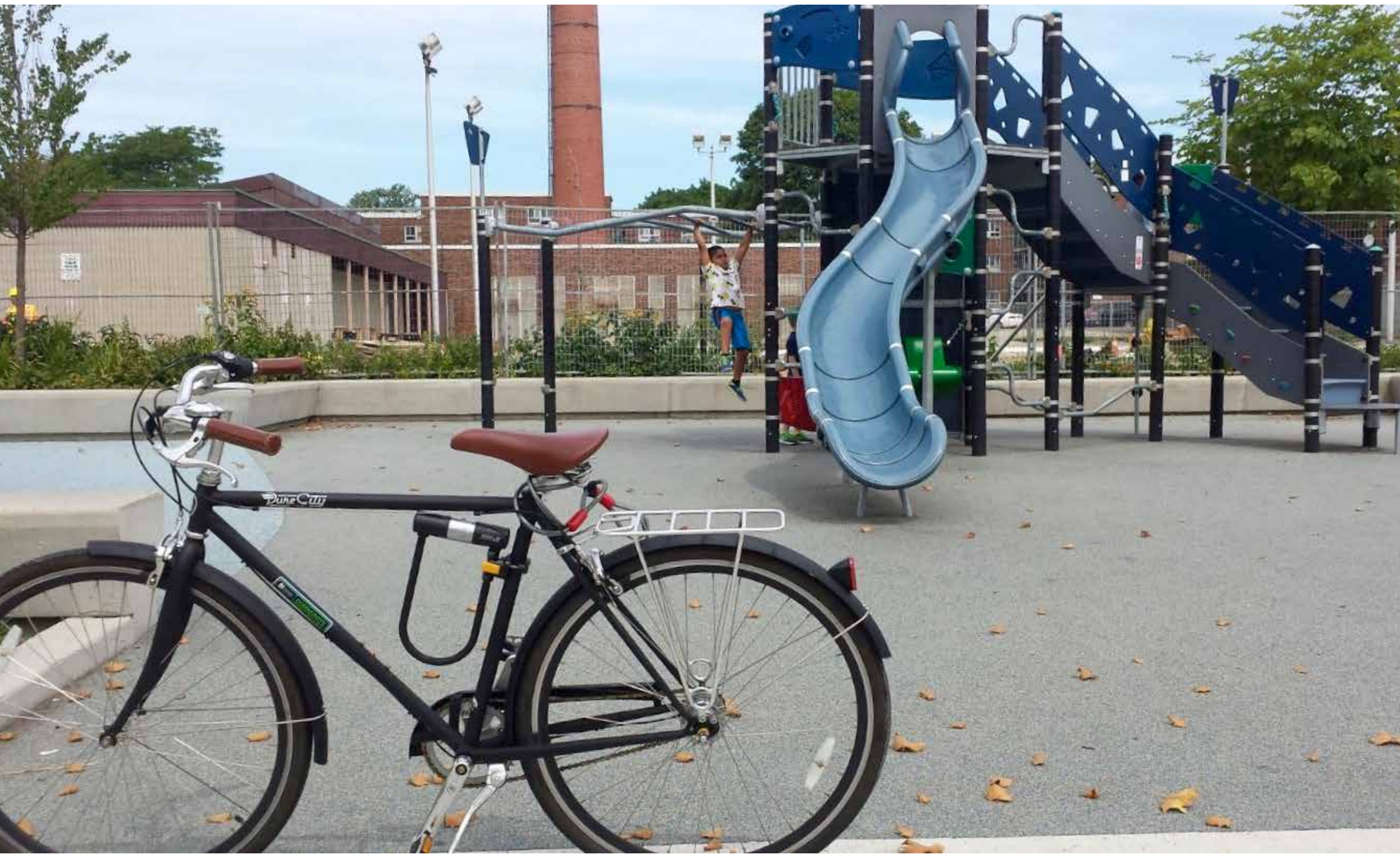
"I feel like my home. I feel like I'm very familiar with this area and this city, and I know now more roads, to have more routes, to use bike lanes. It's very good."

- West Central Asia & the Middle East

*“I want to explore Toronto,
it’s not because I love it, but I
wanted to get quickly adjusted
with Toronto and the lifestyle
and everything. I want it to feel
like home. So that’s what I was
using the bike for.”*

- Southern Asia, Western Europe,
Northern Europe





Unfamiliar Places

The experience of migration involves an abrupt break with familiar places and a transposition to a strange environment (Powell & Rishbeth, 2011). The difference can heighten a sense of loss, contribute to feelings of exclusion and also provide moments of nostalgia when qualities of the new place unexpectedly trigger memories of other, more familiar landscapes (Powell & Rishbeth, 2011).

Place has been defined as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (Massey, 2005:130, in Williamson, 2016), meaning that when we visit somewhere, we remember the experiences we have had there before, and we draw on those memories to navigate the space. For example, we may already know where the bathroom is located, where the best place to sit is, and what we would like to order from the restaurant. This personal store of knowledge is built up over time, through social interactions and everyday use of the place (Powell & Rishbeth, 2011) and allows us to feel confident and comfortable. Conversely, continually finding yourself in unfamiliar places can be overwhelming and can reinforce feelings of exclusion. For newcomers, “developing insider knowledge of places can provide a sense of establishment, tangible markers

that represent a break from newcomer status” (Rishbeth and Powell, 2013: 173, in Williamson, 2016).

This project applies this definition of place to travel as well. It explores the idea that routes are more than simply a series of right and left turns. Rather, they are personal histories, unique to each traveler, and embedded with memories of muddy patches to avoid, which staircase is generally the least crowded, and what useful stops are along the way. Place-learning is then coupled with route-learning, which is an equally critical part of building belonging (Williamson, 2016). Added to this narrative is the dimension of mode, and the premise that, of all travel choices, cycling allows a traveler to add the most amount of information to their personal store of route knowledge, or cognitive map, particularly in a local context. As the insights of the Bike Host photographers have revealed, the bicycle can serve as a useful tool for newcomers, who are looking to grow their knowledge of an unfamiliar place and make it quickly feel more like home.



Building Belonging

A positive sense of belonging to the local community is an important indicator of health, used by the Canadian Index of Well-Being and the Canadian Community Health Survey. Research has shown that individuals who are socially isolated and report a low sense of belonging are more likely to suffer from poor mental and physical health (Statistics Canada, 2015b).

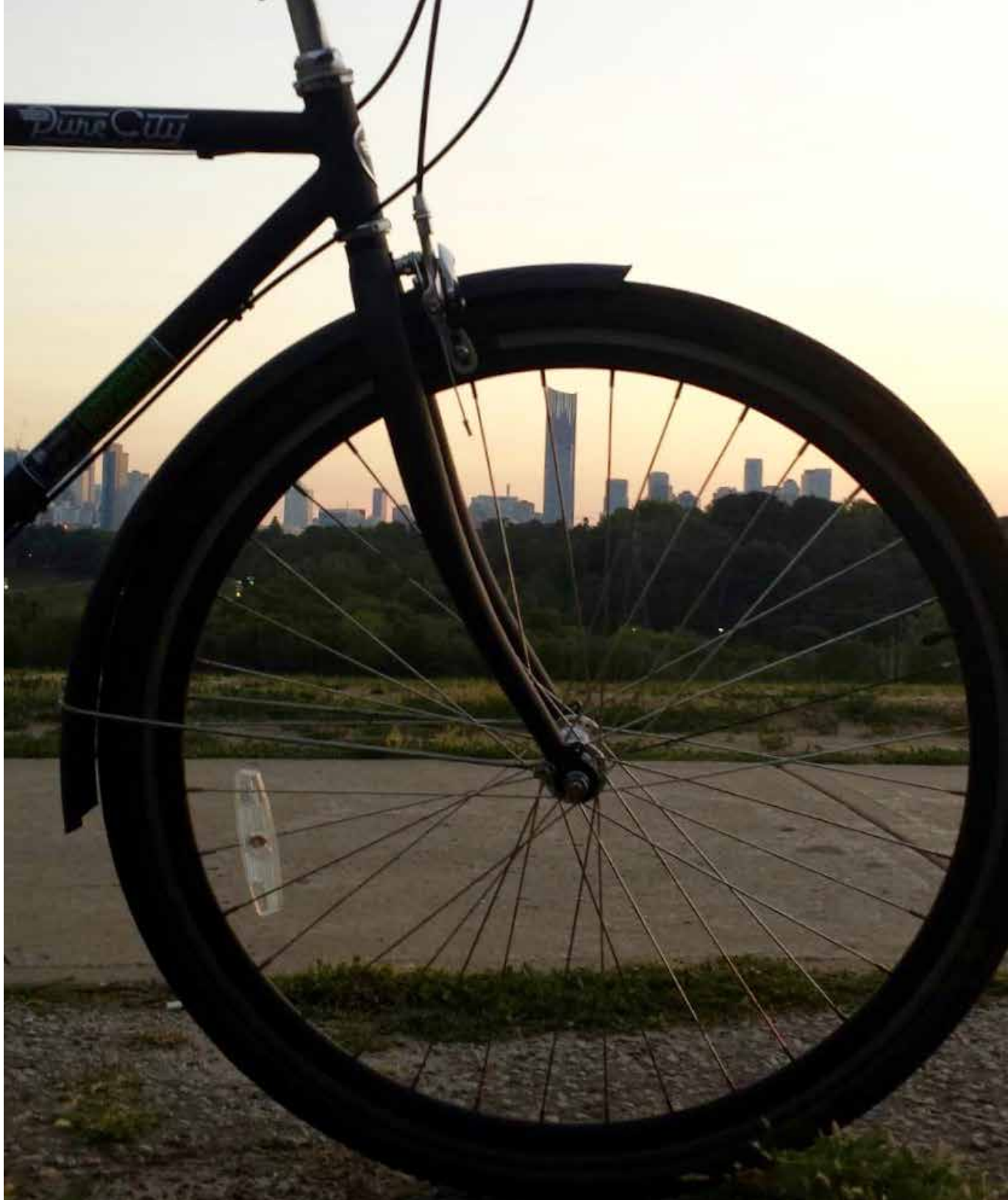
For newcomers, belonging can be understood through the lens of nested communities, meaning that a newcomer might quickly have a high level of integration within a local sub-community, be it family, ethnic, religious, or neighbourhood, and gradually build outwards to the broader community, and then to society as a whole (Weinfeld, 2000). Generally, a sense of belonging grows as length of stay increases (IRCC, 2016), but a completely comfortable sense of belonging within the broader community may never occur, especially for those who immigrate as adults. These individuals often describe feeling like they have one foot in their new home and one foot in their country of origin (Laird et al., 2013; Weinfeld, 2000). A recent study of

a Bangladeshi enclave in Victoria Park, a high-rise neighbourhood in Toronto's inner suburbs, identified a high level of integration amongst newcomers within their apartment block neighbourhood, but found that Toronto was viewed as a foreign territory (Murdie & Ghosh, 2010).

The obstacles to successfully building a broader sense of belonging are many, including the inability to practice one's profession at the same level as before, the need to learn a new language and culture, and discrimination (Laird et al., 2013). However, familiarity with and comfort in public places and the ability to navigate confidently across the city's landscapes also play a critical role, and intersect with these other factors in complex ways (Williamson, 2016).

A surprising finding from this project is that the process of place-learning, even at a very local scale, was not limited to those who were newly arrived in Toronto. The photographers who had been living here for three or four years also described noticing more than they had before. They shared equally in the feeling of wonder at the

beautiful places Toronto has to offer and at the parts of their communities of which they were unaware. Their increased knowledge of these places strengthened their sense of belonging. These photographers had been traveling in Toronto for years by other modes, without achieving this level of place-learning. Their experiences with the bicycle offer strong support for the connection between knowledge of place and mode choice. It also points to the importance of the mentor, particularly at the beginning, to act as a bridge into the unknown cycling world of Toronto.



Conclusions and Considerations for Planning

This project explored the mobility challenges experienced by newcomers in Toronto (McKeary & Newbold, 2010; Basu, 2013; Lai & Hynie, 2010). Many other people experience similar barriers, including low income groups (Roorda, Pàez, Morency, Mercado, & Farber, 2010), those who are homeless (Hui, 2015), and those without a car living in small towns or rural areas (Social Research & Planning Council, 2012). In the United States, clear connections exist between income, ethnicity and mobility (Zimmerman et al., 2015).

Recently, there has been considerable pushback against these inequities, particularly with regard to transit, with disadvantaged groups demanding an equal level of service (Zimmerman et al., 2015). The same conversation is only beginning to occur in relation to bicycle infrastructure. However, a number of groups who experience social exclusion due to limitations on their mobility stand to gain considerable independence and inclusion through better access to bicycles and cycling infrastructure. Here, we have looked at these benefits specifically for newcomers. The University of Montana has launched a program that loans adapted bicycles to individuals with physical disabilities living in small towns, where transit access is limited

(NCBW, 2016). Access to a bicycle can also be transformative for people who are homeless; up to now, this area has received little attention (Crawford et al, 2012; Zimmerman et al, 2015). In Niagara Region, Ontario, an interest group collects donations of bicycles to give to migrant workers (NMWIG, 2015). A pilot program called Everyone Rides in Hamilton, Ontario, is placing bike share stations in low income neighbourhoods and offering free or discounted memberships through community organizations who serve people in need (Topalovic, 2017).

These programs all focus on making bicycles accessible, but cycling infrastructure is also an important part of ensuring these groups feel safe and encouraged to ride. Bike lanes have been shown to be a large component of route choice (Hunt & Abraham, 2007) and decisions to ride (Mitra, Ziemba & Hess, 2016). Their location is particularly important in a city like Toronto, where much of the immigrant and lower income population lives in the post-war inner suburbs (Hulchanski, 2010), areas which currently have drastically lower levels of cycling infrastructure than the downtown core (Ledsham & Savan, 2017).

Currently, bicycle infrastructure planning, like transportation planning generally,

is more concerned with the type of trip than with who is making the trip. For example, the *Transportation Tomorrow Survey*, conducted every five years in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, asks detailed information regarding the origin, destination and purpose of daily trips, but does not ask about income, ethnicity or immigrant status, making it difficult to determine which groups are experiencing mobility inequities. Trip purpose is critical because the transportation models used to weigh the benefits of different potential infrastructure projects give a higher value to trips undertaken for work or commuting purposes (Aldred, 2015). This approach influences bicycle infrastructure planning, where the idea persists that the utilitarian cyclist, who commutes to work, is a priority. Planners, researchers, and cyclists themselves are quick to distinguish this useful type of cycling from more frivolous recreational cycling (Aldred, 2015). The categories, however, are not so simple, because commuters often admit to enjoying their rides to and from work, and a pleasure tour can easily turn utilitarian with a quick stop to the grocery store along the way (Van Duppen & Spierings, 2013; Aldred, 2015).

The one category of traveler for which information is collected, and which consistently forms part of the dialogue

surrounding bicycle infrastructure is gender. Women, although they make more trips daily which are short enough to be cycled, are under-represented among cyclists (Mitra, Smith Lea, Cantello, & Hanson, 2016). In Toronto, only 33% of cyclists are women (Mitra et al, 2016), although in the downtown core, where cycling rates are the highest, the number rises to 45% (Ledsham & Savan, 2017). While research has been conducted into the reasons for these differences (for example, Garrard, Handy, & Dill, 2012), this understanding has not translated into widespread targeted efforts to increase cycling for women.

There is a need to open up the conversation to consider the unique needs of other travelers, given the many disadvantaged groups that could stand to benefit from increased access to bicycles and improved cycling infrastructure. Practitioners should make a point of collecting detailed demographic data including income, immigrant status, and ethnicity, when using surveys and tracking tools. From this information a better understanding should be built of which groups are experiencing mobility exclusion, as well as who is currently missing from the local cycling landscape. These identified groups should be a key consideration when weighing infrastructure options. A bicycle plan, and any transportation plan, should



include strategic moves to improve equity and increase the mobility of under-served groups.

Contributing to the issue are the current demographics of the cycling advocacy movement. For decades, these groups have been working from a mostly white, middle-class lens, advocating for safe spaces in which to cycle as a travel preference, and not from the low income perspective of cycling out of necessity (Zimmerman et al., 2015). This same demographic is moving back into dense, mixed use downtown neighbourhoods, where most cycling infrastructure is located. Bike lanes have become entwined in the narrative of gentrification and white privilege (Stehlin, 2015; Hoffmann, 2016). The cycling advocacy movement has become more self-conscious over the last few years, particularly with respect to race, gender and income. Expanding the conversation is important for making the cycling conversation more multi-dimensional and for putting pressure on city staff and politicians to build infrastructure which is intentional about increasing social inclusivity.

Part of opening up the conversation will mean moving away from relying on the old adage, 'build it and they will come.' Although research supports the idea that

providing safe infrastructure, such as a separated bike lane, inspires cycling adoption (Mitra, Ziemba & Hess, 2016), it is likely not enough in some communities where people face multiple barriers to cycling, including a lack of access to a bicycle and affordable repair services, a lack of secure storage, and a lack of cycling knowledge (Dressel et al., 2014; Ledsham & Savan, 2017; Kretman Stewart, Johnson & Smith, 2013). Many of the programs mentioned above have found successful ways of addressing these barriers, for example through mentorship, community training and subsidized or free access to bicycles and bicycle repairs. Moreover, they have built partnerships with new players, including settlement agencies, public housing, community health organizations and recreation centres, offering exciting avenues for connecting disadvantaged groups to cycling programs.

In support of these partnerships, bike lanes should be re-positioned in the municipal context and viewed not just as capital infrastructure projects, but also as public spaces. Like a square with a schedule of concerts and farmers' markets to activate the space, the city's system of bike lanes should have programming attached to it that targets disadvantaged groups. As well as infrastructure provision, the city's role should become one of active invitation.

Instead of 'build it and they will come,' a new motto could be adopted: 'enable them and show them how.'



Photo Credits

Note that some photographers chose to remain anonymous.

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*“Through the bike,
I can **discover the
city.**”*

- Southern Asia, North America, Western
Europe

