

Commuting by bicycle: Why the Irish aren't like the Dutch—yet

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Cities around the world are pouring money into beautiful bicycle paths in hopes of convincing citizens to drive less and bike more. According to a new study in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, however, getting people to go from four to two wheels isn't quite that simple.

"Although bicycling is a widely accepted way to travel around cities in Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands," write authors Marius C. Claudy (University College, Dublin) and Mark Peterson (University of Wyoming), "it is still the most underutilized form of transportation in countries such as Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Specifically, we investigate how consumers' values, attitudes, and reasons for and against bicycling influence their decision to commute by bicycle."

The authors asked people in Dublin, Ireland to list their reasons for and against biking, and found that many participants thought traveling by bike was inconvenient, dangerous, and too hard to deal with in a wet climate—where statistics for Ireland show that biking is actually far safer than walking or driving. Dublin's climate is actually drier than many cities in the Netherlands.

Reasons in favor of biking included saving time and money, improving physical fitness and overall health, doing something positive for their local and world environment, and feeling that they were part of a community of like-minded travelers.

The study shows that the most successful bicycling campaigns will address the public's specific reasons for and against biking and encourage workplaces to provide premium parking, showers, and changing areas for those who bike to work. Social media will play an increasing role in any urban program, with biking-specific weather apps making it easier for commuters to plan routes and perhaps to understand that their city isn't as rainy as they had feared.

The authors conclude by stressing that the most crucial motivating factor may be a commuter's sense of belonging: "Bicycle cultures can impart a special pride about being a bicyclist. Such evidenced pride can make the bicycling community more attractive to others in the area. In this way, community-based initiatives can be an effective way to influence people's beliefs and values and to establish a sense of group identification for new cyclists."

More information: Marius C. Claudy and Mark Peterson.
"Understanding the Underutilization of Urban Bicycle Commuting."
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