

3rd Conference on Sustainable Urban Mobility, 3rd CSUM 2016, 26 – 27 May 2016, Volos, Greece

## Cycling: Utilitarian and symbolic dimensions

Eleni Lourontzi <sup>a</sup>, Stella Petachtı <sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Thessaly, Dept. of Planning and Regional Development, Pedion Areos, Volos, 383 34, Greece

---

### Abstract

This study explores the various factors, both of utilitarian and symbolic nature, associated with the use of bicycles in the city of Volos, a medium-sized Greek city. Deviating from relevant studies carried out to date in Greece, it is based on a differentiated view of the parameters linked to the degree of its use, where emotions, habits and social norms (symbolic) are considered as important as the elements of the natural and built environment and the socio-economic reality (utilitarian). A sample of 363 residents participated in the survey by completing a questionnaire, which investigated the importance of each of the aforementioned elements. The key questions posed concern the investigation of a) the correlation of the above factors with the intensity of cycling in the city of Volos, b) the attitude of citizens towards cycling and cyclists and c) the role of cycling in the user's everyday life. The results revealed that symbolic factors are associated with choices, habits and future changes in users' behavior and led to the conclusion that both factor groups play a significant role in understanding and redefining the behavior of individuals towards the increase of cycling in cities.

© 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V.

Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of the 3rd CSUM 2016.

**Keywords:** behaviour; cycling; emotions; symbolic; utilitarian

\* Corresponding author. E-mail address: [petachtı@uth.gr](mailto:petachtı@uth.gr)

---

### 1. Introduction

The bicycle has always been a popular means of transportation which appeals to all ages. In modern times, due to the need for sustainable mobility, its role is being upgraded from a simple transportation method to an important tool for the promotion of sustainable mobility and development (Vlastos, Mpampopoulos & Mpaltas, 2005), while its character has since become two-dimensional, both utilitarian and symbolic.

In Europe, considerable progress has been marked, in policies and legislation and also the infrastructure related to cycling (Vlastos et.al, 2005). More specifically, the main idea promoted by the European Union is that people shall feel free and safe moving with a bike in an urban environment, because cycling does not only reduce the social and ecological impact, comparing to other forms of transportation, but it also promotes sustainable mobility. Most European cities are now focusing on traffic education and policies developed since they have already ensured proper infrastructure (Vlastos et. al, 2005).

According to Vlastos, Mpampopoulos and Mpaltas (2005), Greece is characterized by a delay in integrating policies on sustainable mobility and a substantial change is essential, in both institutional gestures and citizen attitude. The main reason for this delay is the lack of infrastructure, which has an impact, among other things, on users' attitude,

who often perceive cycling in the city as a dangerous activity. After all, it is widely known that the elements of the urban structure and the available infrastructure affect citizens' choice for transportation.

At this point, the importance of psycho-emotional factors should also be noted, as they often determine people's choices in transportation. The user's emotional state is related to the environment he acts in, as he receives a variety of stimuli from it (Vlastos, Mpampopoulos & Milakis, 2007). Therefore, we believe it is necessary to research the association of these factors with the intensity of cycling to highlight the factors which can promote the sustainable Greek city.

## **2. Purpose and basic hypotheses**

The goal of this study was the identification of the factors related to the intensity of cycling in a medium-sized town, which in turn can trigger the increase of cyclists in Greek towns and redefine citizens' relationship with the bicycle. The study was conducted in Volos since it is a typical example of the gradual decline of cycling even though it is a bicycle-friendly city thanks to its mild climate, flat surface, and the relatively small distances (Vlastos, Milakis & Athanasopoulos, 2004). At the same time, it is a town that, through the last decades, has attempted to reinstate cycling in its everyday life, either through local government policies or corporate actions of its citizens.

Deviating from relevant studies carried out in Greece, this one is based on a differentiated view of the parameters linked to the degree of bicycle usage, where emotions, habits and social norms (symbolic) are considered as important as the elements of the natural and built environment and the socio-economic reality (utilitarian).

The key questions posed, concern the investigation of:

- the correlation of the above factors with the intensity of cycling in the city of Volos
- the attitude of citizens towards cycling and cyclists
- the role of cycling in the user's everyday life

## **3. Participants – Content – Research method**

The study was conducted in the city of Volos, which offers a morphologically appropriate environment and its citizens have a preference towards cycling. Despite this advantage over other Greek cities, transportation within its limits is based on private motorized means and less on public ones. However, the current tendency for a transition to environmental friendly means of transportation (Vlastos et. al 2005), as well as the inclusion of sports in everyday life, upgrade the bicycle to an ideal option since it is an attractive and affordable method, which combines ecological and sporting character (Eva Heinen, Bert van Wee & Kees Maat, 2010). Important questions are arising associated with its use, such as whether this is possible in a large city or whether citizens intend to include it in their everyday life. For this reason, there was an attempt to look into the factors that affect the use of a bicycle in the city of Volos, both utilitarian, such as infrastructure and symbolic, such as the intention for cycling.

The sample was random and consisted of 363 citizens. This number of citizens volunteered to complete the questionnaire, which was posted online and was available for completion for 30 days. The study was conducted by posting the above-mentioned questionnaire and was forwarded by e-mail to the community of the University of Thessaly and was also promoted through leaflets which were distributed at the city center.

The aim of the process was to balance participants concerning their gender and so the final sample included 163 men (44.9%) and 200 women (55.1%) aged 18-60. People aged over 60 years were not included in the study because a small percentage of this age - group is using the bicycle (Public Issue, 2013). More specifically, this range of ages was classified and the final sample was the following: age 18 to 30 were 259 (71.3%), age 31-45 were 68 people (18.7%) and age 45-60 were 36 people (9.9%). The research was mainly directed at cyclists but also took into consideration the views of a small portion of individuals who do not cycle, which stands at 64 people from the 363 sample.

Regarding education level, high school graduates amounted to 105 people (28.9%), graduates of technical training institutes or private training institutes were 16 people (4.4%), graduates of universities amounted to 163 people (44.9%) while 79 people (21.8%) held master degrees.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5125036>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5125036>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)