

Is Cycling Normal?

A Cultural Approach to Transport

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About Me



- Neither a proper transport person nor a proper modeller...

(And maybe not even a proper cyclist...)

- Instead a sociologist with a background including critical policy studies, social movement studies...

Social and Cultural Issues in Bicycling

Tuesday April 16th. 10am: Is cycling normal? A cultural approach to transport.

Friday April 19th. 10am: 'Londoners, not cyclists'?
New cycling advocacy in London

Monday April 22nd. 10am: Transport modelling: what can qualitative methods offer?

Thursday April 25th. 10am: Cycling uptake and cycling systems (workshop, with James Woodcock)

From the land of make believe...



This seminar

- Argues for a cultural perspective on transport, using the example of cycling and specifically the ESRC Cycling Cultures research project.
- Not opposed to other perspectives, but complementary to them.

CyclingCultures

CyclingCultures is a multi-method sociological research project that focused on four relatively high-cycling cities in the UK in order to find out why cycling thrives in particular areas.

The four fieldsites were **Hull, Hackney, Bristol** and **Cambridge**. All have differing social structures, economic histories, spatial characteristics and political environments.

We were funded between Jan 2010-Dec 2011 by the **Economic and Social Research Council**. The research was carried out at the **University of East London**. Although the funded period is finished this site and in particular the main [blog] are still updated.



The project
Researchers
Methods
Bike blog
Terms



Talks + papers
Postcards + zines
Time-lapse films
Practitioner forums
Bike portraits
Bike stories

QUICK LINKS

- Cycling & Society 2012
- Cycling Cultures Blog
- Project Report
- Bike Stories.

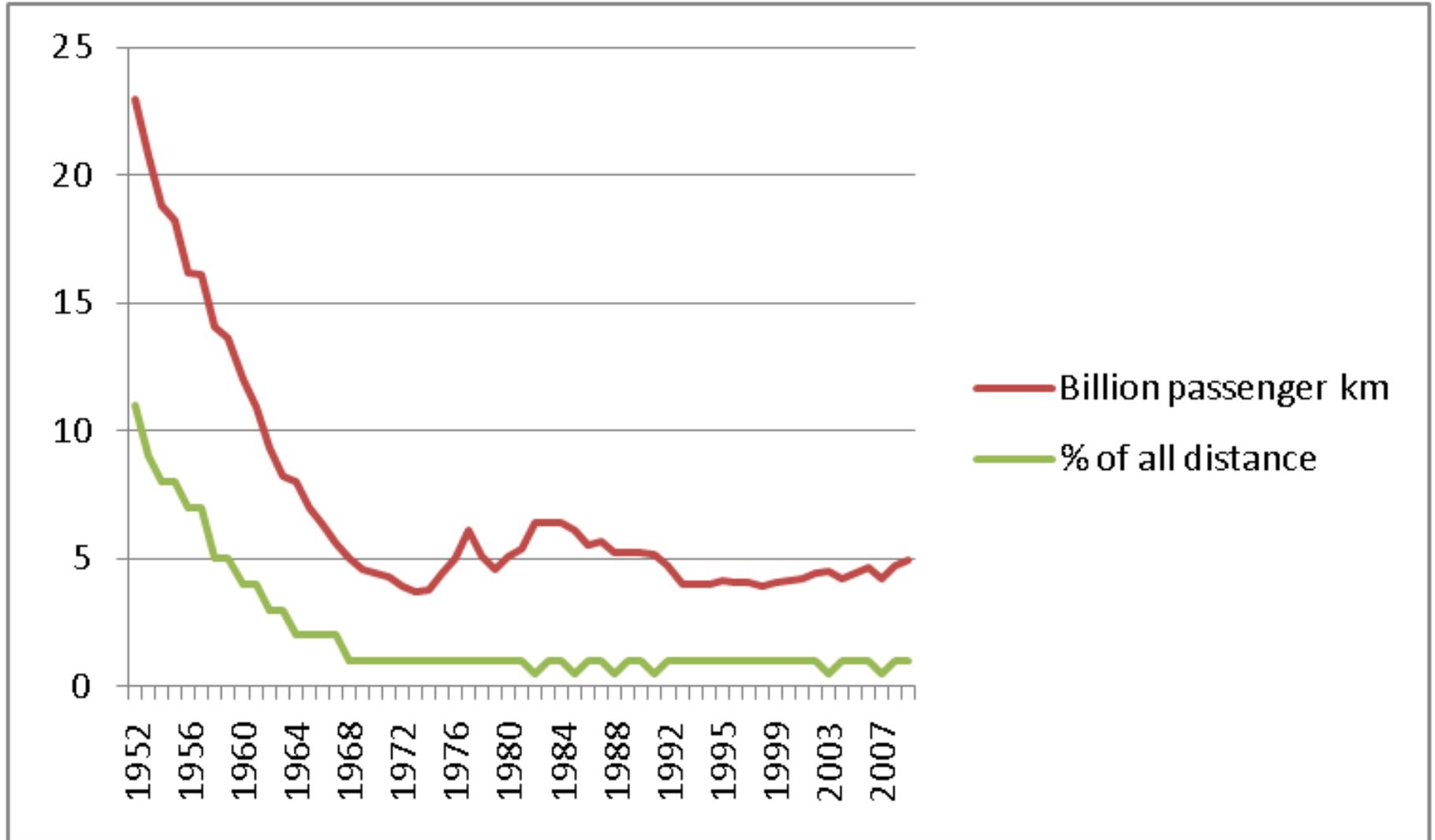


Outline

- Background – policy and evidence
- Social/cultural approaches to cycling
- The Cycling Cultures project
- Discussion

Ongoing policy failure...

(at a national level)



The 'problem' of evidence

- Ogilvie et al (2004) concluded that '[w]e lack good evidence either on which interventions are likely to be effective in promoting a shift from using cars towards walking and cycling or on the actual effects of such interventions on population health'.
- Yang et al (2010) 'it is unclear whether increases in cycling could be achieved at lower cost [compared to infrastructural improvements] by addressing attitudes and perceptions about cycling'

The importance of culture (But in what ways?)

- ‘Non-cyclists in bicycle-oriented cities may respond differently to policy interventions than non-cyclists in cities with little bicycling. Research has found that non-cyclists who are surrounded by other cyclists may be more likely to have contemplated cycling and thus more responsive to policy interventions’ Pucher et al (2010: s106)
- ‘In countries that start “from scratch” with low bicycle use and a poor bicycle network, interventions that promote cycling may have different (probably larger) impacts.’ Van Goeverden and Godefrooij (2011: 3)



Research on cycling and identity in UK

- Often focused on class
- Usually little comparison
- Often focused on low-cycling contexts; cycling as abnormal or subcultural

Cycling, Clothes, Identity

An avid cyclist is somebody who like, they live and breathe it really. You know the sort, you'll see them when you're driving somewhere going up a really steep hill and all you can see is these legs like tree trunks (laughter)

If I come up against a girl in high heels on a bike not wearing a helmet I'll be more likely to try and overtake her coz I think I've got more right to be on the road in my helmet and my fluorescent jacket than she does, if I'm honest

I'm seen as a cyclist by friends I think, just because I don't drive, I never have... other people have made me think, "Oh, it is part of my identity really", you know, but still, I can remember starting out and being absolutely rubbish at it and scared, and my first memory really is of a really big old three wheeler with a boot on it, back in, well it must be early sixties I suppose.

Source:
Sustrans
website

Cycling for women



With high profile women such as Agyness Deyn, Lily Cole and Madonna taking to two wheels, it was surprising that Sustrans' research found that 79% of women don't cycle – but riding a bike is one of the easiest ways for women to keep fit.

Beyond the Black Box and the Rational

- Cycling Culture as ‘Just There’

VS.

- Cycling as Non-Cultural



Boccioni, Dynamism of a Cyclist, 1913

Methods

- Over 150 interviews (narrative + stakeholder) in Bristol, Cambridge, Hackney and Hull
- Participation in rides, events, etc.
- Observations
- Documentary analysis – local & national
- Archival research
- Visual methods / artwork / web

- Approach





200 yds



2010

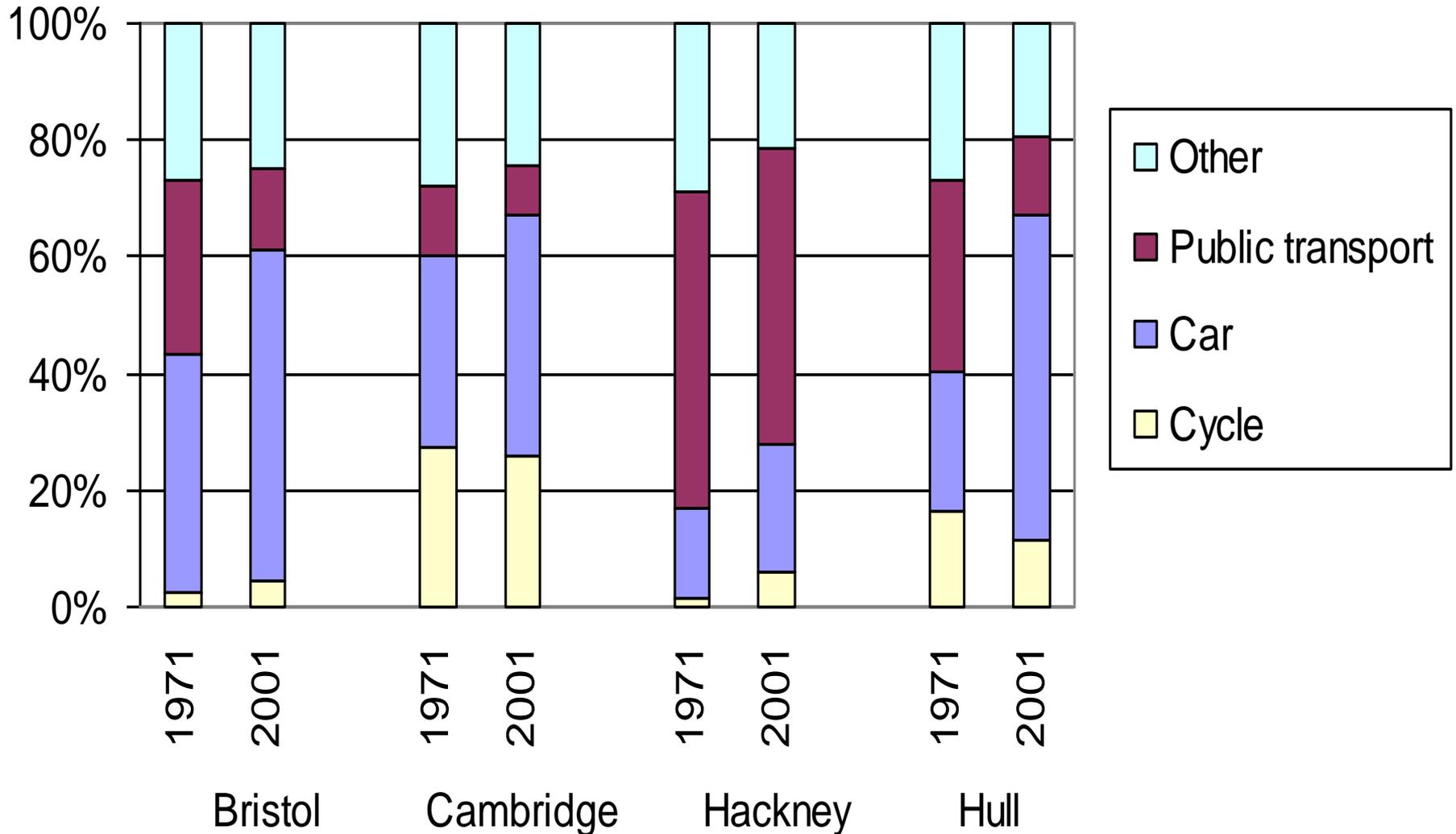


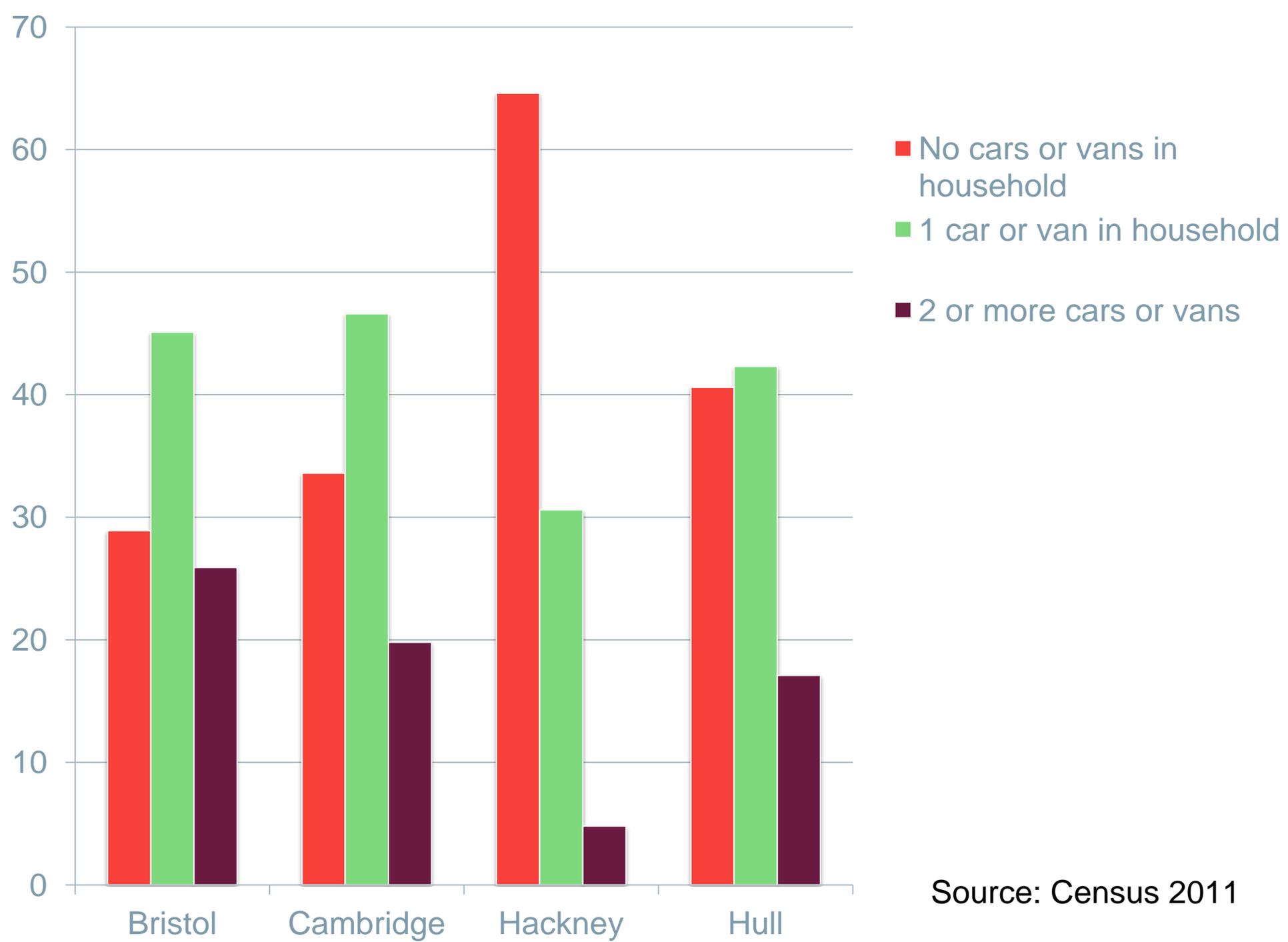
2011



Context & history matter

- Main mode of travel to work, 1971-2001





Source: Census 2011

Cycling, place
and people –
four snapshots



Cambridge: utility, peer pressure and class

- In California erm... certainly it was, “Oh my God, they’re on a bicycle! What are they doing that for, can’t they afford a car?” Where here there is the feeling that, “Well, he’s on a bicycle because he’s made a choice to do that.” (CN17)
- Very occasionally [the car is used] for, you know, picking up other people’s children, but even there, we try and cycle, or encourage them to cycle or, [the car is] not something we tend to offer, you know. (CN9)
- [S]ince I’ve been working there whether it’s people feel guilty I don’t know, they’re like “Oh you cycle in to work? Oh well maybe I ought to start cycling” (CP18)

Hull: cycling, lack and loss

- For most people it's, it's not a life style choice. It's the only vehicle they have. (HUS4)
- Where I live it's a little dead end of an avenue and there's no parking, everybody has more than one car, everybody has a car, the wife has a car, the kids grow up and get their cars and nobody seems to, to cycle and in them days it was different. Everybody had bikes and they worked on the fish docks or they worked at the erm Smith and Nephews that was just up Hessle Road and such. So everybody went to work on a push bike, that, they the Hessle Road in the morning rush hour was just a mass of push bikes. (HUN12)

Cycling and nostalgia...



based on **true events**

From nostalgia to exclusion

- *Sometimes there's a struggle to find both physical and social space to be a cyclist*

I always think that when you're cycling, obviously near the gutter, that it's so uneven and so rough and of course you can't move so far coz you're getting in the way of the traffic.

You don't expect your lawyer to turn up on a bike, it just (laughs) you know, it just doesn't seem to ring true really does it?



Emerging vs. established cycling cultures

- Different cultural assumptions; different cycling identities
 - In Cambridge and Hull, very different associations of cycling
 - But in both, not associated with culture, seen as choice or subculture
 - Bristol and Hackney are very different – and interestingly, two of the few places in the UK (with Cambridge) where cycling is increasing...

Subculture and struggle #1: Bristol

- [My colleagues] do utility cycle but not like I do [...] You know, they'd get changed into their full on Lycra, even to cycle five miles, and they're like, "Do you shower when you get to work?" I'm like, "No, because I don't sweat". I don't go fast enough or put any effort in. I just bumble along at a snail's pace and look at the flowers and, so I think they do utility cycle but in full kit on a nice bike and probably with a rucksack (BRN3)
- Why can't I just look how I want to look? Do I have to dress up on the bikes particularly? On the other hand, I don't want to have to dress, I just want to wear what I want to wear and that not to be weird. (BRN13)



Subculture and struggle #2: Hackney

- There are some really crazy characters. There's one guy that I've seen cycling around in Dalston who makes his own bikes and he's got this ridiculous one which is two frames on top of each other. (HAN19)
- Much as I might try and deny it, I'm middle class I, you know, I'm a white middle class person living in Hackney. I ride a bicycle, I, I, I live on [] Road, I'm, you know, I'm one of the only white people on my street (HAN10)
- Investing in a bike and having somewhere to store a bike actually is a reflection of prosperity in a way. (HAN3)

**Look
mum
no
hands!**

Look mum
no hands!

49



- “I’m not a kind of geeky bike enthusiast, I don’t know how to clean my bike, I don’t know how to change or oil my chain or... My bike’s in a bit of state because it’s never been cleaned because I don’t really know how. I’d kind of like to but I haven’t really got round to it. So I’m a bit scared of hanging round with like seriously bikey people who know serious bikey things, I’m not really a serious bikey person. My bike’s about me having freedom to get round, I’m not a... I’m a cyclist, I’m not a cycling enthusiast.”

Conclusions

- Cultural interventions / interventions as culture
- Culture as/and infrastructure
- Cycling as part of local (and national) cultural imaginaries – place matters
 - But it matters for different people in different ways

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