Chapter 9
Towards a Competitive Sustainable City:
Cycling as an Opportunity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses the dynamic of the development of cycling in Italy situating it also in the European context from an economic and strategic perspective. With this aim, first there was a study of the challenge of rapidly growing urban populations in spatially very limited areas affects not only residential housing construction. It also relates to urban infrastructure and services. This led to identification of new mobility needs, met mainly by private means, with implications in terms of congestion and air pollution. Results are analysed in terms of total trips of non-motorized urban mobility and help at understanding how promoting cycling is important for individual health, environmental sustainability and transport demand management. The chapter brings the debate on sustainable transport policy into direct confrontation with the embodied practice of cycling in an urbanized environment.

INTRODUCTION

The global population is increasingly concentrating in cities. Globally, more people live in urban areas than in rural areas, with 54 per cent of the world's population residing in urban areas in 2014. In 1950, 30% of the world's population was urban, and by 2050, 66% of the world's population is projected to be urban. Levels of urbanization vary greatly across regions. In 2014, high levels of urbanization, at or above 80 per cent, characterized Latin America and the Caribbean and Northern America. In Europe, around 73% of the population lives in urban areas (United Nation, 2015). Cities and urban areas face many challenges — economic, social, health and environmental and their shape is changing dramatically. They present the typical features of the current process of urban transformation "characterized by growth and the differentiation of urban activities which are resulting in new metropolitan spaces that are enlarged and distantiated in terms of scale and scope" (Salet, 2007, p. 6). As the major function of

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cities is to provide places for people to trade, produce, communicate and live, the urban environment needs to be assessed from a very specific human perspective: to provide an agreeable place to live while minimising or balancing negative side effects. Quality of life in cities relies on a range of components such as social equity, income and welfare, housing, a healthy environment, social relations and transport (EEA, 2010). Transport is associated with positive connotations, but the impacts and the benefits have a high price (Geerlings et al., 2012). However, the negative effects resulting from mobility cannot be ignored when sustainability is considered.

It's important to identify new mobility needs in the cities. Sustainable mobility is a priority for action for the EU, although the issue is limited resources (CEC, 2001) the cities could use plus investments fund for sustainable urban development. There are opportunities and benefits associated with urban living in terms of sustainability and resource use.

The role reserved for the urban quality of life and livability of the cities is significant and is reflected in numerous studies in national and foreign literature. High human activity, population density, the excesses of motor traffic and traffic congestion, and not least the many spatial elements and the air quality are all factors contaminating the quality of urban life. The power of the automobile has reduced the alternatives offered by other transport modes since, besides the psychological attachment to the private comfort of speed and seamlessness offered by the car (Sheller & Urry, 2000; Urry, 2006), it has inevitably shaped the physical form of urban mobility so that other modes of mobility do not fit in: cyclists and pedestrians have to fight against the symbol of cars, and space for bicycle paths or pavements has to be "stolen" from the "natural". The importance of urban policies and their effectiveness is closely linked to the ability to exploit the land in all its components by focusing on quality of life and meeting the needs of residents. A quality of life, and more specifically quality of urban life, is defined as "the state of social wellbeing of an individual or group, either perceived or as identified by observable indicators" (Pacione, 2005, p. 673) oriented also to the principles of sustainability. Urban quality, based on strong elements of identity and specificity, has thus become the determining factor in a process of continuous economic development in an integrated way that involves public and private resources (Travisi & Camagni, 2005).

In this context, strong planning policies that favour non-auto modes of transport assume increasing importance (Kenworthy & Laube, 1997). The efficiency and effectiveness of the transport system help to qualify the supply of city services; also it cannot ignore the important role in shaping the image on tourism (Page, 2009). In this perspective, addressing the issues concerning sustainable mobility would make a positive contribution to the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the communities they serve, where the aim is also to contribute in an integrated network of actors involved to the development of eco-friendly cities.

Cycling is a sustainable mode of transport (CEC, 2001; 2007) and it has a role in building a better, healthier and ecological society while at the same time offering a tourist attraction role as a possible niche to exploit and promote among the different ways of enjoying the city (Gatersleben & Haddad, 2010; Lumsdon, 2000). Increased cycling should contribute to reducing noise and air pollution and it has important implications for both personal health, having been linked to lower rates of overweight and obesity (Wen & Rissel, 2008), as well as livability and environmental resources.

The aim of this chapter is describes the importance of sustainability in urban areas and to promote the bicycle as a means of transport fitting with wider social and environmental agendas. It shows also an analysis of Italian cities in terms of development, sustainability and infrastructures to promote cycling as an opportunity to reduce environmental degradation.