Cycle Space: Cities seen through the lens of the bicycle

People in cities all over the world cycle for a different reason, because of the exercise, because it looks cool, or just because cycling is the quickest way to navigate through their cities. Australian architecture professor Steven Fleming studied cycle culture in different cities and presented his results in the book ‘Cycle Space’. In this book Fleming explores ways to make better cities by connecting cycling, architecture, design and urban planning. One of the cities Fleming discusses is Amsterdam.

Bicycle friendly cities are better cities

In ‘Cycle Space’ Fleming studied the aspects that make cycling attractive to people. He argues that understanding why people choose to cycle is key for discovering the full potential of the bike as a transformative force in the design of cities. And, on the basis of that knowledge you can build better cities, not only better for cyclists, but for everyone.

Cycle Space

‘Cycle Space’ is a central concept in Fleming’s book. The idea is that each cyclist develops a cycle-space map of their city in their mind. This map of the city is different than a car driver’s map. The perception of distance is different, cyclists look at streets in a different way and small alleys that you might not even know as a car driver can be the central streets in a cyclist’s mind. By looking at all those different cycle-space maps, and realizing what makes a city attractive for cyclists, you can build a more bike-friendly city.

Dutch bike boom in oil crisis

In the introduction of his book Fleming discusses how the Dutch cycling culture originated in the oil crisis of the 1970s and why it took the Dutch so little time to build a great bicycle infrastructure while it is taking so long in other areas. This Dutch politicians in non-cycling nations face a dilemma that did not
Amsterdam Cycle Chic is practical. The citizens of Amsterdam cycle because it is practical. It is just the quickest and easiest way to get around. Everybody does it, no matter what age or sex you are and how much money you earn. Haring links the popularity of cycling to the populace’s Calvinist roots. Though the number of people going to church in Amsterdam has become very low in the past decades, the Protestant roots resulting from the Calvinist tradition, is still very present in Dutch society and Dutch bicycle culture clearly reflects that tradition. Fleming: “Counting oneself among the Netherlands’s elite requires cycling to work in all weather.”

If you want to learn more about global bicycle cultures and about how cities through a lens of the bicycle could make cities a better place? Then Cycle Chic is certainly a book for you!

- Cycle Space is published by nai010 publishers, Rotterdam. Order a copy of the book on their website.
- The research for the book has been funded by the crowd through the Australian crowdfunding site: www.pozible.com. Below you can see the video used for the crowdfunding campaign.