

# Collective strategy for a new mobility culture in Madrid

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## Abstract

The city of Madrid lives an exciting time of change in its pattern of mobility. One of the generators of this change is the introduction of a Cyclist Mobility Plan.

The most recent performances in cycling infrastructure does not touch the surface of the street now occupied by motorized traffic, and the cycle lanes are running largely on sidewalks, reducing and deteriorating pedestrian realm and creating conflict.

The Pedestrians Association *A pie* is concerned about this contradiction with the real spirit of the Plan, which has among its main objectives the pedestrian priority and prominence, and in this sense the regeneration of public space. A space which should not be thought only with traffic criteria and dimensions for pedestrian mobility, but especially from a social, urban and environmental point of view. The pedestrian space is a place to stay!

Bicycles can be an important ally of the passer-by if policies are promoted without detrimental to those who walk, facing the common problems associated with automobile's massive presence and high speeds. The common goal of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users should be an alliance, between means of locomotion with common interests and objectives, but with different space needs, speeds and travel patterns.

To avoid confrontation between the potential allies, it is necessary to establish a careful strategy of promoting cycling, integrated into an overall policy of sustainable mobility with the pedestrian as protagonists. A strategy that offers alternatives to cyclists without detrimental to pedestrian, and which generates step by step a new culture of mobility, not only in political discourse, but especially in public behaviour.

A PIE, cycling and Neighbourhood associations are working on a joint strategy to create social and cultural conditions of greater respect and coexistence among people who opt to more sustainable forms of mobility. Among a series of collective actions, stand out the publication of a "Small guide to think about mobility", promotion of discussion forums and a collective manifesto. The main objective of this lecture proposal is to present this partnership strategy.

### **Qualifications of presenters**

Verónica Martínez Vázquez and Mateus Porto Schettino are architects, active members of the Pedestrian Association - *A pie*, and PhD students in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning from the Polytechnic University of Madrid. Their research is focused on sustainable mobility and urban vitality.

# Collective strategy for a new mobility culture in Madrid

## Time of changes

The city of Madrid lives an exciting time of change in its mobility's patterns. One of this change's generators is the bicycle introduction and promotion as a new agent in the streets. Madrid's government set a target of 3% for cyclist mobility in the modal split by 2016, apparently a low figure, but with a great importance compared to the current 0.6%. These introduction dues to an important social demand, and was supported by the City Council by means of its recently failed Olympic candidature.

Probably the most representative measures adopted in this field, during the last years are: the Bicycle Mobility Plan (PDMC) approval in 2008, the Madrid cyclist ring's construction, and some other cycle routes and infrastructure, as bike racks all over the city, an initiative for public bike renting and a reform of the city's mobility regulations to favour cyclists' situation.

In contrast, there is no such integrated strategy or measures' pack towards pedestrian mobility. We could only talk about some doubtful benefits for those who walk, in some recently actions with other main goals, as commercial or traffic ones, in spite of pedestrian real needs. Some examples of those very eye-catching and expensive projects are: the *M-30's* (city main ring road) burying, and the renovation of important and central commercial streets like *Fuencarral* or *Serrano*.

This paper resumes this process focusing on cyclist and pedestrian organizations' stands and attitudes facing the new challenges.

## Planning versus Execution

It is important to say that the Bicycle Mobility Plan had a very good reception among specialists and users. The document includes an extensive cycle lanes' network, technical recommendations for different cycle routes typology, its election and implementation, besides the complementary measures to be adopted.

It is remarkable that among its main goals the Plan includes the pedestrian priority and prominence and the regeneration of public space. This specific objective finds a practical application in the infrastructure's inventory which complements the Plan technical with solutions, finding a place for cyclist's infrastructure attending to some guidelines for the transformation of the existing section.

According to those guidelines, defined in a priority order by the Plan, which goes from "reducing the number of motor lanes" untill "transforming open spaces", affecting sidewalks is the last option after those which change motor vehicles' space. Nevertheless, it seems to be that the recommendations are not being respected, maybe during the projects' elaboration and supervision, or between that phase and the final construction.

The result is that the most recent performances in cycling infrastructure in Madrid do not affect the street's surface now occupied by motor traffic, and the cycle lanes are running largely on sidewalks, reducing and deteriorating pedestrian realm and creating conflicts. And beyond that, what it is most worrying, creating a wrong idea and culture, especially for new users, that the bicycle natural place is on the sidewalks.

## The social debate

As a sign of concern about this contradiction some mobilization of civil organizations, as *a pie* or others dedicated to cyclists' rights and ecological aims or inclusive at the university field, could be noticed and some meetings were organized. The "2 ° Cycling Infrastructure Technical Seminar" and "Madrid's Bicycle Social Forum" are representative of this debate process.

There was also a communication channel with the City Council, the "PDMC Monitoring Commission" to follow the Bicycle Plan development, where different organizations could express their ideas and distress about it.

It is quite notable that all forums were about cyclist's matters, but also where pedestrians found some place to take part in public decisions about urban traffic questions.

It is remarkable that cyclist associations are well organized and have already an important role and visibility in this social debate. Some count with a great number of active participants and a large history of claiming. Also large is the Pedestrian association *A pie's* experience, which history of struggle started in 1995 with the aim of introducing the pedestrian in the social and political agenda of Madrid. That means, pushing the social organizations and political parties to consider pedestrians in their proposals and actions. Since then, *A pie* had several phases of persistent activity with modest success and resounding failure.

Most recently, and related to that discussion, *A pie* participated in an active way in those meetings and particularly dedicated a number of its publication "small guide to think mobility" to bicycles. The aim of this guide is to clarify, and expose, as a civil association, some stands about certain themes related to mobility. In this specific case, it basically makes a reasonable defence of pedestrian space and advocates the importance of focusing efforts towards a deep change in the city mobility model, which entails an important reduction of automobiles primacy.

The defence is based on the idea that public space should not be thought only with traffic criteria and dimensions for pedestrian mobility, but especially from a social, urban and environmental point of view. The pedestrian space is a place to stay!

Bicycles can be an important ally of the passer-by if policies are promoted without detrimental to those who walk, facing the common problems associated with automobile's massive presence and high speeds. The common goal of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users should be an alliance, between means of locomotion with common interests and objectives, but with different space needs, speeds and travel patterns. The conflict generated by the double occupation of the sidewalk just interests car drivers, and gives a negative and not actual image of the bicycle's use.

To avoid a confrontation between the potential allies, it is necessary to establish a careful strategy of promoting cycling and walking, integrated into an overall policy of sustainable mobility with the pedestrian as protagonists. A strategy that offers alternatives to cyclists without detrimental to pedestrian, and which generates step by step a new culture of mobility, not only in political discourse, but especially in public behaviour.

This concept supported *Apie's* discourse in all different forums, and apparently there was a quite good agreement about it among other participants.

The "2 ° Cycling Infrastructure Technical Seminar", was offered, in June of 2009, to professionals and technicians of the administration, organized by the Center for Transportation Research at the Polytechnic University of Madrid (TRANSyT) with participation of the City of Madrid and, in this case, with the collaboration of the Netherlands' Embassy.

It had two main sessions where *A pie's* president, Marcos Montes, *participated* as moderator and special *rapporteur*. One session was dedicated to other cities experience, and the other, entitled "Necessary coexistence", has specially interest to this paper. Briefly, one of the journey's conclusions presented was that the bicycle incorporation in the city, without a comprehensive approach to mobility, can generate a conflict and confusion in which the biggest loser is the pedestrian, weakest link in the chain, and also the cyclist. That was illustrated with some unfortunate examples of public performances of cycle routes' implementation in which it is clear that lack of a serious reflection about the bicycle's role in the urban mobility context and that ultimately, the car remains untouched. The communications of the speakers, Alfonso Sanz, Gianni Rondinella and Esther Anaya, also addressed the current problem of mobility from the regulations' perspective.

The legal vacuum and uncertainty about cycling and its relationship with pedestrians, generate contradictions and iterative problematic approaches. The final debate stressed the need of a comprehensive mobility policy development to pursue common goals and provide consistency to the set of actions undertaken.

The "Madrid Bicycle Social Forum", was a popular initiative with the intention to analyze and reflect on the current status of the bicycle, as a means of transportation in the city, to devise strategies for the future creating synergies between the social agents and weaving mutual network. It consisted in a week of events, in November 2009, including workshops, lectures and debates. In one of those sessions *A pie* shared table with the cyclist association *Pedallibre*, and explained why it is so important to defend pedestrian spaces as a place of social relation and exchange. Juan Merallo, from *Pedallibre*, reinforced that concept and argued that the bicycle is a vehicle and as such, its natural space is the road, and must observe the utmost respect for pedestrians in shared spaces.

During the discussion, there was a great consensus about respecting pedestrian space among the audience (most cyclists). But also became clear that, in spite of all goodwill between associations, the conflicts will come out. And it is necessary to establish a collective strategy to face the new challenge in an alliance stand, avoiding entering in the fighting dynamic which could be expected.

On the other hand, the "PDMC Monitoring Commission" represented the official citizen participation channel, related to the Bicycle Plan implementation. It was organized by the Mobility Foundation of the City Council (institution in extinction process, apparently because of economic reasons). There, in several occasions, joined agents from neighbourhood associations, cyclist organizations, *A pie* in representation of pedestrians and municipality's technicians from the different departments related to Plan.

In those meeting, technicians showed progress and forecasts while associations suggested the identified problems in a general way and in specific cases. The technicians usually promised to take suggestions into account and justified adopted measures considering problems as exceptions. However, the mistakes were repeated in subsequent proceedings, and at each meeting associations insisted on the same subjects, making of the debate a repetitive and tiring process.

## Regulation

Five years after the adoption of the current Mobility Ordinance, in 2005, City Council is amending it. The changes affect twenty six articles and also involve the addition of seven new precepts and the removal of nine. There are some news for loading and unloading, special transport and violations, although the most important changes affect bicycles' movement.

Local authorities explained that this articles' adaptation is particularly responsive to the objectives of the Cyclist Mobility Plan and the forthcoming launch of a public bicycle rental system, *MyBici* (now paralyzed due to economic reasons).

The new text emphasizes safety. For example, motor vehicles, circulating behind a bicycle, must keep a distance of at least five meters, and on the road, bikes shall circulate occupying the central part of the lane. Also, when bicycles and other vehicles share streets of one or more lanes in each direction, and when it is indicated by specific signs, the automobiles' speed will be adjusted to the bike's and in any case can not exceed to 30 km / h.

The new ordinance apparently contributes to traffic calming and, undoubtedly, favour cyclists. Nevertheless, when the text tries to regulate the relation with pedestrians things are not very clear.

Except in the "areas provided for that purpose", it prohibits the movement of bicycles on sidewalks pedestrian priority streets and other pedestrian areas. There vehicles must drive at a moderate speed and pedestrians always have priority. It says that if the vehicle is a bicycle, and if the distance between the rider and pedestrians can not be more than 1 meter, the rider should get off his vehicle and walk to ensure the safety of pedestrians.

However, those areas provided for pedestrian and vehicles circulation are not well defined, and lots of different cases could be related to that. The text impose a circulatory and traffic references incompatible with the really nature of pedestrian realm, and besides the minimum distance obliged, no others conditions to bicycle or pedestrian movements are established.

## Statements

The new ordinance is under approval process and citizens have an opportunity to express their opinion by means of presenting statements suggesting and justifying modifications to the text. Statements were presented by cyclists and walkers' associations and in *A pie's* case, the main goal is to guarantee pedestrian priority.

For example, related to bicycle circulation through shared spaces, a new wording was proposed in order to not disturb or affect the pace and presence of pedestrians on sidewalks:

*On roads or public spaces specially designed for the movement of pedestrians and vehicles, the pedestrian always has priority, the vehicles must adapt their speed to pedestrians, never exceed 10 km / h, and not engage in careless maneuvers or rash that may affect pedestrians' safety or disturb their movement or stay in the public space.*

In order to avoid cycle lanes typology over sidewalks, *A pie's* statements also include more restrictive criteria to its application. They must be duly justified in the absence of a valid alternative to other types of cyclist's infrastructure. And when applied, they must be well signed with a different pavement, recognizable by blind people. Finally, pedestrians will have preference to cross the cycle lane anywhere and riders must ensure that there is no interference with pedestrian, adjusting their speed to prevent any incident.

Another important subject in question is the parking regulation. The new ordinance gives the same treatment to bicycle, motorcycles, or any other two wheeled vehicles: it permits those to park over sidewalks, under certain conditions. This is one of *A pie's* most important concerns, especially in motorcycles' case. This permission, reinforced by a lack of control and sanctions by authorities, leads to an indiscriminate and dangerous motorcyclist's behaviour. In spite of the ordinance's prohibition of circulation on sidewalks with the engine working, few are the riders who truly get off and push their vehicles. Also the minimum sidewalks dimensions demanded for parking are constantly ignored.

As remarked above it is very worrying that a wrong idea about pedestrian's space is being created. In this sense, *A pie* defends that motorcycles' parking should always occur on the road to avoid a motorized use of pedestrian's space, while bicycles' parking may, in certain circumstances and as an exception, take place in a pedestrian area.

Unfortunately, the approval's process does not include an opportunity to discuss all statements presented, and remains in the government hands the decision about considering or not the proposed modifications to the text.

## Conclusions

The city of Madrid lives a time of changes in its mobility habits, especially due to the bicycle's promotion. In contrast and in spite of the favourable figures about walking trips in the city modal split, there is not an integrated and official strategy or Plan towards pedestrian mobility.

Consequently, a conflictive situation between cyclists and pedestrians is being generated and reinforced due to mistakes in recent public performances of cycle routes' implementation.

Motivated by their concern about this situation, civil associations work on a collective strategy to create social and cultural conditions of greater respect and coexistence among people who use more sustainable forms of mobility.

This strategy, defined in several meetings and reflected in a public manifesto, supports a change in the current mobility unsustainable model, seeking to recover the civic coexistence in a public space now dominated by traffic. It is a change to ensure the pedestrians' priority and rights, and quality for staying and displacement of most vulnerable people such as children, the elderly or disabled.

## **References and interesting web pages**

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