

# Exploration of Cycling Communities

Guidance and inspiration



**Tour de Force**

**Tour de Force publication**  
October 2024

# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Defining cycling communities.....	4
Communities.....	4
Organising communities.....	4
Cycling communities: communities of cyclists.....	6
2. Origins, goals, and types of cycling communities .....	8
How are cycling communities formed? .....	8
What goals do cycling communities pursue? .....	11
How do cycling communities organise themselves? .....	13
Types of cycling communities in the Netherlands .....	14
3. From bike rides and repairs, to networking events and lobbying.....	16
Activities of cycling communities .....	16
The impact of cycling communities.....	18
4. Continuity and long-term viability .....	20
What do cycling communities need to (continue to) exist? .....	20
The role of the government.....	22
5. Recommendations for governments .....	24
The first question: why? .....	24
Community knowledge.....	24
Perspectives from cycling communities.....	25
Finally .....	25
6. Appendix .....	26

## Acknowledgements

Authors:

Angela van der Kloof and Boukje Dotinga (Mobycon)

Shelley Bontje (Dutch Cycling Embassy)

Dutch to English translation:

Karen Veldhuis (Veldhuis Vertaalt!)

# Introduction

Several initiatives, projects, and organisations in the Netherlands present themselves as cycling communities. Tour de Force is increasingly receiving questions from government bodies about the role of these cycling communities in promoting cycling. To date, limited information is available about cycling communities in the Netherlands. What types of cycling communities are there? And what are their similarities and differences? How are cycling communities set up, is there continuity, and how do they organise themselves? This also raises the question of whether this offers opportunities for governments to start a cycling community themselves or to support existing ones.

For this publication, we sought answers to the above questions through an exploratory qualitative study. We interviewed community organising experts to gain insight into the essence of communities. Approaching the concept of cycling communities broadly, we interviewed and emailed seventeen cycling communities in the Netherlands and seven abroad.

We hope this publication offers inspiration to anyone interested in exploring cycling communities. The first chapter outlines our understanding of what constitutes a cycling community. We then describe how cycling communities are formed, their goals, and the various types we encountered. In the third chapter, we examine the activities of cycling communities and their impact. The long-term viability of cycling communities is discussed in chapter four. What do they need to function over a more extended period? In the final chapter, we present recommendations for governments. The international cycling communities are featured throughout the chapters as brief 'intermezzos'. For readers unfamiliar with cycling communities, we've included an appendix listing the names of the communities featured in this publication, along with a brief description.

The publication shows that a rich variety of cycling communities is active both within the Netherlands and abroad. They have in common that they are spaces where people talk about cycling and bicycles, and riding together plays an important role in bringing people together.

# 1. Defining cycling communities

**“Community, in its most basic definition, can be defined as individuals who share a common interest, background or purpose that gives them a sense of cohesion.<sup>1</sup>”**

## Communities

People come together in many different ways and for many different reasons. This happens, for example, within families, with friends, colleagues, neighbours, and like-minded individuals. People who come together in a group can form what is known in English as a 'community'. However, not every group is considered a community. People may come together simply because they have something in common, like a group that signed up for a workshop on making Italian pizza. These people are interested in pizza, Italy, cooking, or good food, and there are many other reasons why someone might join such a workshop. They become a group of people when they arrive at the workshop location. A *sense of connection* may arise during the workshop as participants share the same experience, but this does not automatically constitute a community.

What characterises communities is that the people who come together feel a mutual connection. They share the same interests, norms or values. They share these within the community, making it a *meaningful social structure* for them. Beneath the social structure lies the higher purpose that gives it meaning. These higher goals include health, a nice neighbourhood, contributing to the environment, or solidarity.

*It's about granting each other space and goodwill, about being there for one another. You invest time in the relationship.*

Ifor Schrauwen, community expert, founder of *Het Vogelnest* ('The Bird's Nest') in Dordrecht.

Another characteristic of communities is that they are dynamic social systems that are often perceived in a positive light. It's no surprise that communities evoke positive associations. People are social beings and naturally seek each other's company. The dynamic aspect refers to the fact that the community is constantly evolving. Changes in group composition, activities, meeting places, the group's name, or ways of organising are all inherently part of communities.

## Organising communities

People organising themselves is nothing new; they often do so because they share a common problem or interest and want to bring about change.

## Community Organising

In the 1980s, 'community organising' emerged in the Netherlands, following the example of other English-speaking countries. It is a specific method to enable communities to stand up for their goals and to achieve them. Trade unions and campaign organisations often use this method. It is also used in neighbourhoods, where community organising professionals work with residents to address problems by putting pressure on the government or, for example, a housing association. An important aspect of community organising is informing and educating people on social, political and economic issues and the environment, and encouraging them to actively engage in creating change and shifting power dynamics.

As part of our exploratory study, we interviewed Peter Kodde, a community organising expert who works as a Senior Organiser at Milieudefensie ('Friends of the Earth').

---

<sup>1</sup> The original English quote can be found here: <https://extension.umn.edu/community-news-and-insights/five-ways-think-about-community>

*One of the most successful campaigns was the Clean Air Campaign, in which we set out to identify the most polluted streets and engaged with the people who lived there. Who is affected? Is there leadership within the community? You then give these people the tools to take action themselves and pressure the local government. The key is that these people take on an active role. They shouldn't just point out the problem and say something needs to be done; they should also propose solutions themselves.*

Peter Kodde, community organising expert, Senior Organiser at Milieudefensie.

In the publication *Why neighbourhoods need to organise – an exploration*,<sup>2</sup> Ifor Schrauwen and Peter Kodde write the following about the current state of community organising in the Netherlands:

*Budget cuts and a changing spirit of the times led to a downturn at the start of this century, shifting the focus toward individual support. In recent years, interest in a more collective approach to addressing problems in neighbourhoods has actually increased. Having learned through trial and error, we are beginning to realise that the individualisation of collective responsibilities gives rise to many other problems. Problems that not only harm the individual but also society as a whole. As a result, there is also a growing interest in Alinsky's organising method and his work 'Rules for Radicals'.*

### Community Building

In the UK, the term 'community organising' is not commonly used; instead, people speak of 'community building' or 'community development work'. This goes beyond mere differences in terminology; it reflects a divergence in political tradition and in thinking about how change should be brought about. Community Building is inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher who is known for his ideas about critical pedagogy. He believed that education should help oppressed people regain their sense of humanity and empower them to take action to improve their lives.

In addition to differences in terminology and political tradition between countries, there are also variations in financial resources across different contexts. Between the US and the UK, for example.

*They [in de US] got a funding stream, because if you are doing community organization you get tax breaks. So, community organizing is a thing that's actually part of the American structure, of philanthropic capitalism. In the UK we don't have that structure. So, we can't professionally organize amongst groups of people, because there is no funding stream.*

Peter Cox, Professor Emeritus at the University of Chester (UK) and author of *Cycling Activism*.

It is essential to remember differences in traditions and available resources when reading this publication. This applies not only to differences between countries, but equally to differences between local authorities and regions.

---

<sup>2</sup> Published by LSA residents:

[https://www.lsabewoners.nl/wp-content/uploads/LSA\\_verkenning\\_community\\_organising.pdf](https://www.lsabewoners.nl/wp-content/uploads/LSA_verkenning_community_organising.pdf)

## Online Communities

The word *community* on a larger scale is relatively new in Dutch. It is connected to the rise of online platforms, which have become increasingly well-known and widely used through social media. The dominance of English in online work and digital marketing has led to the frequent use of the English word *community* in Dutch.

Brands and companies active on social media frequently build so-called *brand communities*. They do this because consumer interaction increases sales and brand loyalty. Social organisations also use social media and platforms to grow their supporter base and engage people in their goals and activities.

## Cycling communities: communities of cyclists

We stated that a group only becomes a community when a shared factor holds meaning for its members. Living in the same neighbourhood or region can be a shared factor, typically combined with a commonly experienced problem or shared interest. When we talk about cycling communities, we refer to a group of people for whom the bicycle is the unifying factor. In many cases, cycling communities are about talking about cycling and sharing the cycling experience. Cycling together is an important way for members to bond.

We have also seen that beneath the social structure lies a higher purpose that gives it meaning. Examples of these higher purposes include health, a pleasant neighbourhood, contributing to better environmental care, and solidarity. Thus, this exploratory study pays attention to the practical matters that cycling communities deal with and the underlying purposes that drive them. As Peter Cox puts it:

*From the community organizer point of view, the first thing someone should be asking, is 'What are the aims?'. Because, you got a group of people who might not form a community. They just have something in common. And you want to establish closer links between the group, so the question is, why would you want to do that? What for, and therefore, I think, that then begins to drive a whole lot of things that you can do, or not be able to do.*

Peter Cox, Professor Emeritus at the University of Chester (UK) and author of *Cycling Activism*.

In the next chapter, we explore how different cycling communities in the Netherlands have emerged, their underlying purposes, and the forms they take.

## **IRELAND: TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY FORUM (TMF)**

### **"It's not about transport, but about a liveable environment"**

shares Darren McAdam-O'Connell. "Throughout our careers, our priorities and work have become so narrowly focused that the well-being of the broader community is no one's top priority."

There is support when suggestions are made to help the community, but ownership is lacking; no one feels responsible. For that reason, the forum plays a vital role in serving the common good.

### **Two heads are better than one.**

TMF provides a networking opportunity for coordinating sustainable and active travel projects. It consists of a diverse group of stakeholders, including advocacy groups, government officials, public transport providers, and private sector parties. It is crucial to understand the context in which activities are carried out. The group's broad composition provides insight into this context and contributes to making appropriate decisions regarding mobility and society.

Bringing together different stakeholders with diverse perspectives promotes the effective use of individual expertise. This variety of insights leads to richer and more well-considered outcomes and implementations.

Founded in 2012, Cork.

Founded by the Transport and Mobility Forum, supported by the Cork Environmental Forum.

## 2. Origins, goals, and types of cycling communities

**We start at the beginning. Where do cycling communities originate from? Do they emerge overnight, or is it a gradual process? And what goals do they pursue? Do they have concrete goals?**

### How are cycling communities formed?

Our exploratory study reveals that cycling communities can originate through different pathways. Sometimes, there's an apparent reason or starting point. Such a community emerges because it seeks to draw attention to cycling or cyclists, usually focusing on a specific theme, type of bicycle, or group of cyclists. A particular development, such as a political decision, a news item, or the staging of an event, can trigger collective action and a desire among people to connect. Other cycling communities are formed without a clear starting point. There are already various cycling-related activities taking place in a neighbourhood or city. Over time, these parties come together and start coordinating their efforts (2).

1: In 2016, a proposed legislative amendment was submitted to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (I&W) to classify the speed pedelec as a 'moped' (requiring a yellow license plate and prohibiting its use on bicycle paths). To prevent this legislative change, the 'Kopgroep Speedpedelec' ('Speed Pedelec Breakaway Group') is formed; an informal group that lobbies for the position of the speed pedelec on Dutch roads.

2: In the Boschveld neighbourhood in Den Bosch, active local residents begin repairing bicycles together, both their own and abandoned bikes, to give them a second life. At the same time, cycling lessons were also offered to former migrant workers and asylum seekers. The individual initiatives came together at the community centre Copernikkel ('Cupronickel'), eventually leading to the establishment of an official cycling hub.

An important factor in forming such an organised group is the presence of a key individual or individuals. This is someone who emphasises the added value of collaboration and takes the initiative to start. Or perhaps even wants to build a community from scratch. In our exploratory study, we came across two 'types' of key individuals: a person who holds a certain (political) status within an organisation or the cycling world (3), or someone who is relatively unknown but has a broad network in a neighbourhood or community (4). Both positions offer a valuable starting point for activating people, each from a different perspective.

3: The first bicycle mayor in Utrecht started four years ago and has engaged in many conversations since then. As a result, he took the initiative to start Fietsmaatjes Utrecht ('Cycling Buddies Utrecht').

4: Olga took up road cycling later in life, wanting to become more active. Gaining confidence by cycling increasingly longer routes, she managed to overcome her PTSD. Eventually, she started her own road cycling club. Everyone is welcome — including those without a road bike (loaner bikes are available) and those with no road cycling experience. Olga's network in the neighbourhood and her efforts to raise awareness of the road cycling club help bring in new people.



We also see that some communities are created top-down, while others are organised and developed bottom-up. From a government or large organisation (top-down), there is a certain ambition, along with the relevant resources, to do something involving cycling and communities, or collaborative partnerships (5). They set to work to realise this goal (6). The ultimate purpose of these communities is sometimes unclear at first or defined in very broad terms. On the other hand, social initiatives, meeting spaces, or informal groups operate bottom-up from a specific higher purpose, but they need resources or organisational support to move things forward (7).

5: In Rotterdam, the policy document Fietskoers 2025 ('Bike courier 2025') has been adopted. One of the pillars, 'promoting cycling', includes the establishment of a Bicycle Alliance. "We felt it was very important that the city also takes part in promoting cycling and that this message is widely supported. There are quite a few parties in the city who believe that more cycling should be encouraged."

6: Organisations in Groningen expressed a desire to collaborate more, share knowledge, and gain inspiration. The province then took on the role of facilitating and organising this. Two sessions with over 70 participants led to the creation of the Fietscommunity Groningen ('Groningen Bicycle Community').

7: Four enthusiastic entrepreneurs and residents from Amersfoort joined forces to contribute to a green, healthy, and smart Amersfoort. They pitched their approach to the province of Utrecht. This led to the commissioning of the 033opdefiets ('033onthebike') initiative.

#### **BELGIUM: PELOTON 8000 (working title)**

**"The initiative doesn't have an official name just yet."**

says Pieter Devriese, project officer for sustainable mobility. "We're still in the early stages." Once the cycling community launches, expected in autumn 2024, the members will decide on a fitting name, logo, meeting location, community structure, etc. The city of Bruges has deliberately chosen not to define everything in advance, giving absolute ownership to the cycling community.

#### **Acknowledge: You talk most about what matters most.**

The city of Bruges acknowledges that there are many cyclists, and by recognising them, it hopes to elevate the collective joy of cycling to a new level. The cycling community starts from a human perspective, with existing cyclists as its foundation. Instead of distant, one-way interactions between citizens and the government, like submitting reports ("I reported those overhanging branches a week ago and nothing's been done"), the aim is to create a community where people can engage in conversation with one another. Genuine and mutual interest is essential in this process.

As a collective, people know more than any individual alone. The cycling community focuses on channelling positive and negative individual energies into a dialogue. This can have a positive, magnetic effect on others, but there's no hidden agenda. The city of Bruges is genuinely committed to the well-being of cyclists, but it can't do it alone. The future and shape of the cycling community will become clear over time.

Founded in 2023, Brugge.

Founded by The City of Bruges.

## What goals do cycling communities pursue?

It's only natural that the reason a cycling community starts and how it takes shape has much to do with the goals it sets out to achieve.

Cycling communities that emerge from a top-down process usually focus primarily on sharing knowledge and collaborating between different parties. The government agency or larger organisation may observe that numerous entities are involved with cycling and seek to promote collaboration and raise awareness of cycling among a broader range of stakeholders (1). By bringing organisations together, a shared responsibility often emerges to achieve specific cycling-related ambitions (2).

1: The Utrecht Bike Community is a network that brings together individuals and organisations professionally involved in cycling within the Utrecht region. The goal is to connect various cycling-related activities, initiatives, and parties, strengthening each other. The network has been further expanded at the request of the local government and the province of Utrecht.

2: "The primary principle of the Doortrappen ('Keep Cycling') community is 'by and for us'. Organisations that join the network retain control over their own activities but share a collective responsibility to promote the Doortrappen philosophy. Everyone feels the same urgency." (Doortrappen)

When a cycling community emerges from a bottom-up process, we often notice underlying social objectives, such as connecting people, creating a meeting place, raising awareness, or organising resources or activities for specific target groups. Encouraging cycling or raising awareness about it is not always the central goal; it often serves to achieve broader objectives.

3: The Bike Kitchen at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) was established to promote and make circularity tangible. "Through bicycle repair, individuals not only learn to maintain their own bikes but also acquire the skills to teach others, fostering awareness and a sense of ownership that contributes to the lifespan of bicycles."

Despite the differences in organisations and objectives, we notice an overarching ambition that the communities have in common. Cycling communities aim to connect individuals and/or organisations. This aligns with the inherent nature of a community, as discussed in the previous chapter.

## **MOROCCO: PIKALA**

### **“We support young people in their professional careers”**

explains Floor Verveer, social project manager. “We do this through training and promoting employment opportunities related to sustainability, especially concerning bicycles - for example, bicycle tour guides, couriers, and technicians. We offer training sessions focused on professional skills, such as presentation techniques and using LinkedIn effectively. Upon completing a training, participants receive a certificate, which helps enhance their CVs and thus contributes to career development.”

### **Young people hold the future.**

Sustainability plays an increasingly significant role among Moroccan youth eager to work in this sector. We aim to assist them in building a healthier and more sustainable future. We guide young people in their professional development, emphasising growth and a professional attitude. This enables the new generation to grow professionally while integrating cycling more deeply into society.

Founded in 2016, Marrakesh.

Founded by Cantal Bakker.

## How do cycling communities organise themselves?

The organisational structure of cycling communities in the Netherlands varies. There is no standard format in which these are organised. Our exploratory study reveals several differences in how these are organised.

Several cycling communities have an official status as a foundation or association. There are also communities which are part of a larger organisation or government department (1). With these forms of organisation, we usually see some flow of funds or allocation of people and resources from a government agency. This makes it possible to set up this type of structure. This safeguards continuity and the underlying vision.

1: The Doortrappen community is organised and facilitated by the national Doortrappen program office, which operates under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. The national program provides the Doortrappen concept, communication materials, facilitates a digital platform, and develops tools that partners can use. There are also meetings for partners and professionals.

In addition to this model, there are also cycling communities without an official structure. Roles and tasks are distributed among everyone, and there is a shared responsibility for achieving goals (2). This way, a community can operate entirely independently from other parties, making it low-threshold and accessible to many people.

2: "We are a very informal network of five to ten people for the organisation of each Haagse Fiets Zwerm ('The Hague Cycling Swarm'). Some are more involved than others, but all decisions are made by whoever is participating in the conversation."

It is noticeable that many cycling communities rely on the involvement of volunteers. These volunteers are typically members of the community or the target audience that the cycling community focuses on (3). The strength of this structure lies in people contributing to their own community, while at the same time it's clear that paid staff are sometimes needed (4). This is usually in the role of coordinator or driving force behind the initiative. A board can also fulfil this role within a foundation or association.

3: At the bicycle workshop of the huis van Compassie ('House of Compassion') in Nijmegen, volunteers work together, ranging from retired bicycle mechanics and handy individuals to status holders, undocumented individuals, refugees, and people with a distance from the labour market or participating in a reintegration process. The bicycles repaired here are primarily intended for status holders, undocumented individuals, refugees, and other people in socially vulnerable situations.

4: Olga's road cycling club receives funding through a local neighbourhood initiative. Part of this funding is allocated to pay for several hours of project coordination. Those coordination hours are essential to get the cycling club off the ground. In the long term, the cycling club may be able to move to a structure where everything is organised voluntarily. At this stage, however, a driving force is still needed.

## Types of cycling communities in the Netherlands

Various initiatives, projects, and organisations in the Netherlands present themselves as cycling communities, such as the Utrecht Bike Community and Fietscommunity Amersfoort. With other initiatives, projects and organisations, it's unclear whether they see themselves as a community. In the case of a significant initiative like Doortrappen, the question arises: "At what point are we referring to the Doortrappen program, and when does the Doortrappen community come into play?" In the case of the Fietsmeesters ('Bicycle Masters'), the volunteers providing the cycling lessons form a community, but those receiving the lessons are not automatically part of it.

Communities can be categorised in various ways. They can be grouped based on the number of people involved or the size of the geographical area. Another way to group them is by organisational setup or the extent of their available means. For this exploratory study, we chose to classify them based on their objectives and activities. The reason for this is that the core of a community, what holds it together, lies in its underlying values and purpose, which are reflected in its objectives and activities. This brings us to the following types of communities.

### An activist lobbying community

The Netherlands has a long tradition of cycling communities that campaign and lobby for better infrastructure, legislation, and support for cycling. The Cyclists' Union (Fietzersbond) is the largest and most well-known community active on national, provincial, and local levels. At the same time, the Haagse Fietszwerm is an example of a small, local initiative.

### A community as a collaboration of organisations

Social organisations that (as part of their services) carry out activities involving bicycles are joining forces to become stronger together. Each organisation is located at its own site, close to its target audience, and can benefit from one another's strengths. They inspire each other to explore and pursue new opportunities. A good example of such a cycling community is Heel Utrecht Fietst ('All of Utrecht cycles').

### A community of businesses that come together

Businesses and social organisations working in the same sector come together physically and establish themselves as a 'bicycle cluster'. This creates opportunities for collaboration, exchange, economies of scale, and potentially cost savings. An example of this type of community is Fietscentrum Nijmegen ('Bicycle Centre Nijmegen').

### Communities of Practice

Groups of people, often professionals, come together to share their knowledge and experiences and to learn from one another. An important aspect is informing each other about developments in the area of expertise or sector. For example, Utrecht Bike Community, Fietscommunity Groningen and the Doortrappen Community.

### A community focused on cycling together in small groups

People go on bike rides together. This can be a weekly activity or less frequent. It's about people meeting each other, going for bike rides, and recognising a shared interest. Fietsmaatjes regularly go on bike rides where the focus is on connecting with one another. Vrienden op de Fiets ('Friends on Bikes') is a community of people who offer recreational cyclists and hikers overnight stays in their homes. In doing so, they enable cyclists to ride longer distances together over multiple days.

### A community focused on getting others involved in cycling

People who love cycling are often eager to pass on the "cycling bug" to others. These communities organise activities to facilitate and encourage non-cyclists or those who don't cycle frequently. They offer cycling lessons, provide bicycles and organise easy cycling trips. For example, Olga's Racefietsclub, the Fietsmeesters and Huis van Compassie Nijmegen. Bike Kitchen UvA also aims to engage diverse groups in cycling by sharing bike-related knowledge at the repair workshop, a central meeting point.

In the previous chapter, the different objectives of cycling communities were discussed. In the next chapter, we look at the communities' activities and their impact through these initiatives.

#### **UNITED STATES: Walmart Mobility MOVE hub**

**“The idea that a cycling culture, cycling infrastructure, or even a cycling industry would develop once seemed impossible.”**

Brady Carman says enthusiastically, “but just 17 years later, it has become a reality.”

Walmart, which is based in Bentonville, has helped economic development and created a spirit of entrepreneurship. A cluster is forming where the private sector, academics, and local residents focus on cycling. The private sector has played a key role in kickstarting and growing the cycling culture and industry, working closely with the community.

#### **Invest: You reap what you sow.**

The economic boost is also attracting other bike-related businesses. From bike-friendly hotels and mobile bike mechanics to a jump from zero to fourteen bike shops in Bentonville.

Industrial tourism has also increased, and professionals from the cycling sector want to be based in Bentonville. It’s an attractive and inspiring place, a breeding ground for the cycling industry, where people can also find economic success.

Founded in 2007, Bentonville.

Founded by Walmart, with support from the Walton Family Foundation.

### 3. From bike rides and repairs, to networking events and lobbying

At the heart of the cycling community are the activities they organise. They create social bonds; they're what hold the community together. In this chapter, we outline the activities of the communities and link how they relate to their goals, target groups, and impact.

#### Activities of cycling communities

From bike rides and repairs to networking events and lobbying. Cycling communities organise a wide range of activities. The types of activities a cycling community organises naturally depend on its goal. We noticed some communities focus on one kind of activity, while others organise different activities and pursue multiple goals. As a result, a cycling community can become a physical meeting place for activities or initiatives that are (indirectly) related to cycling.

The following types of activities are carried out by the communities we interviewed:

- Physical activities with visitors or participants: organising bike rides, cycling lessons or courses, or cycling events.
- Launching initiatives: collecting and refurbishing old bikes, and distributing affordable bicycles.
- Facilitating a network or meeting place: organising knowledge-sharing or networking events, setting up a bike workshop or training where people can come together.
- Raising awareness and visibility for cycling: organising city ride-outs or engaging in political advocacy.

Cycling communities also have an online presence. Most communities have one or more social media channels, a website, newsletter, or WhatsApp group that helps people connect and share information (1). At the same time, word-of-mouth remains very important in communities for engaging and involving new people or organisations (2).

1: "It's hard to make a difference on your own. The more people involved, the more you can achieve. We all share a passion for cycling—and how great is it to share that passion with others?" (Fietscommunity Groningen)

2: "Sometimes businesses are closer to residents than the local government itself, they're more present in the neighbourhoods, among the people. That way, you can organise things you know will hit the mark." (Fietsalliantie Rotterdam – 'Rotterdam Cycling Alliance')

Almost all of the cycling communities focus on a specific target audience. At the same time, there's often a desire to operate as accessibly and 'inclusively' as possible, while also reaching a broad audience (3). Some cycling communities say they've achieved their goal when they've reached the broadest possible audience (4).



3: The Bike Kitchen is organised by the University of Amsterdam, but there is a strong focus on neighbourhood engagement and community building. Activities attract external visitors or local residents, who often become involved as community members themselves. This creates opportunities for interaction between the neighbourhood and the university, allowing knowledge and skills to be shared with a wide audience.

4: The goal of the Haagse Fietszwerm is to draw attention to cycling in public spaces through critical mass rides. They benefit from appealing to a wide and diverse audience. "We are now in the process of discussing how we can attract more groups of people to our events".

#### UNITED KINGDOM: CYCLING UK

**"At the heart of it are people—the people on bikes."**

and campaigning and lobbying naturally follow from that, according to campaign manager Sophie Gordon, to meet the need for more people to experience the benefits of cycling together. "All our activities revolve around the social aspect, meeting others." Bicycles and cycling act as a means to share joy and experiences.

**What matters is this: If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.**

Cycling UK started as a grassroots advocacy group and has always prioritised direct interaction between people, with the community at its core. Whether sharing tips about bike gears or campaigning together for safer cycling routes, the activist approach is about dialogue and collaboration with all stakeholders. The network also provides essential tools, such as information sharing, online collaboration, and discussion forums, to support direct contact between individuals and engaged organisations or institutions.

Founded in 1878, Harrogate.

Founded by enthusiastic cyclists.

## The impact of cycling communities

The objectives of cycling communities are often a mix of making an impact in the field of cycling and creating social impact. Some communities start from a social impact perspective: networking is at the core, and by strengthening their network, a spin-off effect promotes cycling. In other cases, it works the other way around: people are encouraged or facilitated to start cycling, leading to a social impact. A frequently mentioned added value of cycling communities is the ripple effect they create. People who are involved in a cycling community become more enthusiastic about cycling. As a result, people in their social network may also be encouraged to start cycling (more often).

Some communities create impact by making cycling accessible to people who have (so far) rarely or never used a bicycle (1). They teach bike repair skills, provide bicycles to those who don't have one, and help people learn how to ride (2). Other communities create impact by raising awareness about cycling through knowledge sharing, networking, encouraging new collaborations (3), or activism and lobbying. In addition, cycling communities bring people together, helping to reduce social isolation (4) and encouraging more physical activity (5). Finally, the sense of belonging to a group of like-minded individuals creates impact (6). People can contribute as volunteers and take on responsibility, which adds to their sense of purpose.

1: Fietsmaatjes Utrecht pairs people who are unable or unwilling to cycle independently with volunteers who enjoy cycling together. People go out for rides together using side-by-side tandems. Fietsmaatjes aims to contribute to 'cycling happiness' for everyone.

2: We encourage cycling by teaching people how to ride a bike. Taking care of your bike is an essential factor, and through our activities for children, we also want to show them that cycling can be fun and a way to have fun. (Fietshuis Den Bosch – 'Den Bosch Cycling Centre')

3: Fietscommunity Zwolle ('Zwolle Cycling Community') was created as a way to implement one of the goals of the Actieplan Zwolle Wereldfietsstad ('Action Plan Zwolle World Cycling City'). Collaboration between and with (local) partners is key: "Through collaboration, you hope to spark innovation that shifts cycling into a higher gear. And knowing one another makes the barrier to working together lower, allowing great initiatives to emerge."

4: The cycling project by Huis van Compassie aims to help people in Nijmegen who live in poverty get back in the (bike) saddle. A bicycle improves their mobility, network and mental and physical health. In addition, the bike helps people in Nijmegen build social connections (and combat isolation). Finally, the project offers meaningful daytime activities for people with a distance to the labour market.

5: "People feel a sense of belonging, which boosts their confidence and encourages them to go out more often." (Olga's Racefietsclub)

6: "It brings together like-minded individuals, those who offer a place to stay generally enjoy cycling (or walking) long distances themselves, so they enjoy meeting others who share their interests and mindset."  
(Vrienden op de Fiets)

We see that a lot is being done to monitor and evaluate the impact of cycling communities. This includes smaller initiatives. At the same time, the effects of cycling communities can be challenging to capture in numbers or data. For example, creating social cohesion or exchanging knowledge. The focus is usually on monitoring concrete effects, like the number of bicycles, participants, etc. The emphasis on monitoring is likely linked to the dependence on subsidies, which necessitates accountability.

### **BELGIUM: THE CYCLING SCHOOL**

#### **"Cycling lessons are fantastic, but aftercare is key."**

says Jan Christiaens with enthusiasm. "We see that when participants go on bike rides with volunteers after their cycling lessons have finished, a higher percentage continues to cycle, increasing the lessons' impact." Although people may be able to cycle after the lessons, they often don't yet feel like proper cyclists. In addition, many have no one to practice with or to join them on their first weekend rides.

For that reason, the cycling community is an important next step after the lessons. It brings people together and lets them experience how easy cycling can be. It not only improves a feeling of freedom, but also encourages using the bicycle in daily life. In short, the cycling school offers more than just cycling lessons; it lays the foundation for participating in society.

#### **The key to a win-win situation.**

In cities where cycling is common, people see the bicycle as a means of belonging. Some say: "I feel like a true citizen of Leuven," and see cycling as a way to be part of the community. Cycling contributes to integration, not only by offering autonomy, but also by enabling more significant interaction with society.

Founded in 2011, Leuven.

Founded by Mobiel 21, supported by the City of Leuven.

## 4. Continuity and long-term viability

**Cycling communities, in all their diversity, each contribute, both directly and indirectly, in their own way to Dutch cycling culture and help promote cycling. At the same time, the continuity and long-term viability of cycling communities are a true challenge. This chapter discusses what cycling communities need to continue making an impact.**

### What do cycling communities need to (continue to) exist?

Our exploratory study shows no guaranteed formula for keeping a cycling community going, but we identified several things that work well. We see that many cycling communities receive financial support in one way or another. Quite often, this means a paid staff member. They are also often allocated a budget for a specific purpose, such as purchasing bicycles or organising an event. This is typically funded through a local or regional grant or included in the budget of a larger organisation. Sufficient funding to organise activities is essential for the continued existence of most communities.

As a result, a specific dependence on these funding streams and support from governments and larger organisations develops. When this support is discontinued, the question arises as to how much the activities of the cycling community and the focus on cycling will continue. Many interviewees see this continuity as a significant challenge. Several cycling communities are teaming up with other (commercial) organisations so they don't have to rely on just one source. Another aspect is that financial support is often provided through subsidies. This involves accountability procedures, and uncertainties regarding the continuation of activities or the entire organisation come into play. Several cycling communities have expressed a desire for more structured (financial) resources (2). Interestingly, Vrienden op de Fiets is an exception to the rule, as a community with its own Cycling and Walking Fund to financially support initiatives.

1: Utrecht Bike Community organises networking events, always hosted by a different company. This is one of the ways the community contributes to 50% of the costs of the community. Together with us, the hosting organisations organise the location, catering, and other facilities, covering the costs themselves."

2: "It would be helpful, for example, if a fixed and liquid budget was allocated for cycling promotion, so that if something good or worthwhile comes up from the residents, you can respond more quickly."  
(033opdefiets)

Some communities started as informal networks or initiatives and reached a point where they decided to establish a foundation or association. Or they decide to become a part of a larger organisation (3). An important reason is that it benefits the continuity of the community and its activities. It ensures a board and potentially members, making the entire structure much less dependent on a single person (4). It is also sometimes a requirement to be a foundation to apply for sponsorship funding.

3: As of this year, the Kopgroep Speedpedelec has started working on establishing and organising the Speedpedelec Thematic Group within the Cyclists' Union. The ultimate goal is for this group to acquire a statutory position, like the local branches of the Cyclists' Union. For example, this creates more (financial) room for organising information sessions or events. She also receives support from the Cyclists' Union in setting up a campaign to implement an exemption measure, based on the Utrecht model, in as many provinces as possible.

4: "Now that we have a foundation, it no longer solely depends on me or a few others. A lot of things are happening that I don't necessarily know about, but that we have set in motion." – Utrecht Bike Community

In addition to financial resources, cycling communities require sufficiently engaged, energetic volunteers. In many cases, this also includes tangible elements, such as a location to meet and organise activities. The community's objectives and the underlying higher goal then serve as a guide to finding and retaining volunteers and encourage other organisations or companies to support specific requests.

5: "Initially, finding a covered parking area with electricity was challenging. That took about six months, and by then, the momentum started to fade a bit... In the end, a neighbourhood manager was invaluable and even made adjustments to the door to the parking area. (Fietsmaatjes)

From our exploratory study, we conclude that the framework within which a cycling community operates plays a vital role in its viability. The size of the communities varies greatly. 'Vrienden op de Fiets' and the 'Doortrappen Network' can operate at a national level, while 'Fietshuis Den Bosch' or 'Olga's Racefietsclub' focus on the neighbourhood level. Most cycling communities are not only framed by scale but also by target audience. 'Fietsmaatjes Utrecht' focuses on people who are unable or hesitant to cycle independently, while the Bike Kitchen at the University of Amsterdam mainly involves students and faculty members. In this type of community, a framework helps reach the target audience and achieve the community's goals. On a small scale, you are close to the people, and the lines of communication are short (6).

6: "I think the Zuid-Holland region is a bit too diverse... Rotterdam and its surroundings are urban. The issues in that area are entirely different from those in the Drechtsteden." (Rotterdam Cycling Community)

Almost all cycling communities value collaborating with other organisations and parties. This includes both social and commercial parties, as well as informal networks. Learning from each other, helping one another, advising, or carrying out services for each other is essential for everyone to achieve impact. This means that those who are active as organisers within the community need to focus on both internal processes and connections with the 'outside world.' This can be quite a challenge for communities with limited resources.

7: There is regular contact between the cycling programs of the G4 cities. Sportbedrijf Rotterdam ('Rotterdam Sports Office') expressed interest in contacting us about the organisation surrounding the Tour de France so that they could incorporate this into the Tour de Femmes. "These are valuable collaborations." (Fietsmeesters)

Finally, we see that thinking about legacy is essential for the long-term viability of a cycling community. (8) The sense of urgency can decrease over time if a community is created from a specific momentum. Is there a desire to continue existing after this period, and if so, how can this be organised and financed? Considering the community's goals during this stage is just as important. When the urgency has decreased, what keeps the participants sufficiently engaged to maintain a sense of community?

8: The Giro in 2010, the Tour de France in 2015, and the Vuelta in 2022 provided momentum in Utrecht for increased attention on cycling. During that period, several initiatives were launched or strengthened. The same happened in Rotterdam. It is essential to also pay attention to these networks in the years when there is no such event. It's important to think about legacy from the start of an event to create something that lasts." (Fietsmeesters)

## The role of the government

Governments play an important role in cycling communities' (continued) existence. We already mentioned that we have observed a certain level of government involvement in most cycling communities. This can take various forms:

- The cycling community stems directly from the local government organisation or government agency, including establishing a community (perhaps phrased differently) in its annual program or policy. This is the case, for example, for *Fietscommunity Groningen*, *Doortrappen*, *033opdefiets*, and *Zwolle Fietscommunity*.
- The government supports an existing cycling community by providing (financial) resources, such as *Fietshuis Den Bosch*, *Fietsenwerkplaats Huis van Compassie*, *Olga's Racefietsclub*, and *Fietsmaatjes Utrecht*.
- There is regular contact or collaboration between the community and the government, as seen with the *Haagse Fietszwerm* and the *Kopgroep Speed Pedelec*.

There are also cycling communities that don't directly relate to the government, such as *Vrienden op de Fiets* and *Bike Kitchen UvA*. The main reason is that they don't need additional support or resources. They handle everything themselves and operate independently of the government.

It is remarkable that despite the diversity in communities and their relationships with the government, there is a clear and consistent view among cycling communities regarding the role of the government in such communities. They believe that the government has a role as a facilitator: it should encourage collaboration and support existing initiatives and communities. In addition, governments should also take on a certain level of responsibility by contributing in the form of funding, organisational support, or helping to find or provide a location. Finally, governments need to show confidence in existing cycling communities. The government does not need to take the lead itself, and many consider it very important to maintain an independent voice.

## **SPAIN: REDBICI**

### **"There was no unity, there was no group."**

shared by Silvia Casorran Martos, Secretary-General, and Ignacio Junoy de Mayoralgo, responsible for administration and bicycle registration: "The bicycle as a means of transport was not included in most local regulations, and the reference in the national law was too general and vague to be endorsed by local governments." Through the united collaboration of local, provincial, and regional government institutions, we can act as a single entity at the national level and share knowledge.

### **The importance of learning through others.**

The network provides excellent value by offering the opportunity to ask for support. Questions include: "The mayor doesn't want to remove any car parking spaces, there isn't enough room for safe and comfortable cycling infrastructure, and how do you deal with resistance?"

Often, only a single person in the local government is assigned to work on a particular cycling issue. Support from professionals who face similar challenges offers perspective and can even have a therapeutic effect. The most crucial aspect is genuinely the sharing of common challenges.

Founded in 2009, Sevilla.

Founded by ten politicians/representatives of government agencies, currently 153 members.

## 5. Recommendations for governments

The reason for this exploratory study of cycling communities is the demand from governments for insight into these communities and the ways they may or may not wish to engage in setting up or supporting them. In this chapter, we offer recommendations for governments exploring these issues.

### The first question: why?

The key question for anyone walking around with the idea or task of 'doing something' with a cycling community is: why?

The core of community organising and community building is initiating change by bringing people together. Why do you want to bring people together (with whatever activities and materials you use)? What is it that this should achieve? And does that goal offer enough meaning for the people you want to involve?

*Because presumably, if you're trying to intervene you have any intervention, however badly articulated it is, as an idea, you don't want things to stay as they are, otherwise you wouldn't bother intervening.*

Peter Cox, Professor Emeritus at the University of Chester (UK) and author of *Cycling Activism*.

Given the impact of cycling communities, it makes sense to consider goals related to promoting bicycle use and social objectives. The community experts we interviewed all indicated that a good reason and purpose for supporting (or setting up) a cycling community is that, in a democracy, it is essential to have spaces where people can meet, connect, and engage with one another. They also serve as spaces for debate, where the so-called counterforce, essential in a democracy, can be organised.

### Community knowledge

Governments are organised into different domains and departments. The department that deals with cycling is generally the traffic or mobility department. Departments that work with groups of residents, civil society, and social organisations in the local government, region, or province typically fall under the social domain or health department. These departments have extensive knowledge about working with networks of people and communities in general and are familiar with the existing social overview.

We recommend that every civil servant working in a traffic or mobility department engage with colleagues from the social domain. Discuss what ideas you have, which initiatives already exist, and what opportunities you see for collaboration. Engage directly with initiatives and communities, listen to their experiences, and ask how you can support them. Hopefully, the information in this publication will provide helpful tools for preparing for these conversations.

For those who want to explore communities more in-depth, we recommend looking at [the LSA residents' website](#), a national association of resident initiatives. They represent the interests of resident initiatives and share knowledge, for example by publishing brochures. These provide a clear picture of how initiatives and communities operate and what they need. They also offer insight into the language and ways of working within this field. Knowledge of this helps engage in meaningful conversations with colleagues and initiatives.

There is still much to learn about what cycling communities are, how they operate, and their impact. We recommend conducting further research into the ways of working and how the impact of social initiatives such as cycling communities can be measured meaningfully and relatively straightforwardly. We believe cycling communities should play an active, participatory role in this research. They should be supported financially or otherwise.



For most 'cycling officers', exploring a meaningful role in cycling communities is not part of their daily routine. We therefore recommend not hesitating to actively seek support during this search.

### Perspectives from cycling communities

The cycling communities have proposed valuable ideas on how governments can support them. Below, we outline their suggestions.

- Believe in the strength of communities and communicate that belief. Listen, facilitate, and avoid taking the lead.
- Build on existing communities and initiatives, and collaborate with established parties in the field. Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Avoid being the driving force or exerting too much influence over the direction.
- Don't get stuck in endless brainstorming - take action. Learn from organising activities.
- Work with a long-term perspective. Some cycling communities originated from a specific momentum; for example, the Utrecht Bike Community originated from the legacy of activities in the Utrecht region surrounding the Grand Départ of the Tour de France in 2015. Maintaining the positive energy from events like this requires effort. It requires a vision of the added value of long-term collaboration, so that people remain motivated and engaged even after the major event has ended, continuing to contribute enthusiastically to the bigger picture.
- Be creative when it comes to providing support. It doesn't always have to be about funding. It can also involve administrative support, offering a space for free meetings, and access to office facilities. Or helping to find affordable spaces or bike storage.

### Finally

For this exploratory study, we connected with seventeen cycling communities in the Netherlands, seven in other countries, and conducted interviews with different experts. We sincerely thank them all for their time and for sharing their valuable experiences and insights. This publication would not have been possible without their voluntary and enthusiastic contribution. We hope they recognise themselves in the picture we have painted.

## 6. Appendix

The following experts and cycling communities contributed to the research.

**Peter Cox** - Professor Emeritus at the University of Chester (UK) and author of Cycling Activism.

**Ifor Schrauwen** – Community expert and initiator of Het Vogelnest in Dordrecht.

**Peter Kodde** - Community organising expert, Senior Organiser at Friends of the Earth

**Jos Sluijsmans** - Owner of Fietsdiensten.nl

**Bike Kitchen UvA** is a do-it-yourself bicycle workshop on the Roeterseiland campus of the University of Amsterdam, where people can learn to repair their own bikes. In addition to regular opening hours, they organise repair events, workshops, and community gatherings, focusing on connection and knowledge-sharing between different groups.

*Interviewee: Romee Nicolai*

**Fietsmeesters ('Bicycle Masters')** is a bicycle education program based in Utrecht. They offer cycling lessons at community centres and (primary) schools. Fietsmeesters is part of SportUtrecht. They also organise other cycling-related activities, including a (mobile) pump track for children.

*Interviewee: Laurens Hitman*

**Stichting Fietsmaatjes Utrecht ('Cycling Buddies Utrecht')** is an organisation dedicated to supporting anyone in Utrecht who can no longer cycle independently or no longer feels confident doing so. They pair a guest with a cycling buddy so people can go on bike rides together using a side-by-side tandem.

*Interviewee: Christien Rodenburg*

The bicycle project **'Met een fiets doe je mee' ('With a bike, you 're in')** collects unused bicycles, refurbishes them, and distributes them to people with a low income. The project is part of Huis van Compassie and is based at the Fietscentrum Nijmegen.

*Interviewee: Luuk Eickmans*

**033opdefiets ('033onthebike')** is a collaboration in the Amersfoort, Leusden, and surrounding area, bringing residents, entrepreneurs, and the provincial government together. Strategies and actions to promote cycling were developed and implemented in the past. This was carried out on behalf of Goedopweg ('Ontherighttrack').

*Interviewee: Jocelyn Kemker – de Kruif*

The **Haagse Fietszwerm ('The Hague Cycling Swarm')** is an informal group that organises a large group bike ride through The Hague every three months, based on the 'critical mass' concept. The aim is to draw attention to cycling and road safety.

*Interviewee: Amaury Jonkers*

**Utrecht Bike Community** is a network of 700 professionals working on cycling-related topics in the Utrecht region. It consists of public and private organisations. UBC organises its events around the economy, health, social issues, and infrastructure. A foundation coordinates the community.

*Interviewee: Ernest van den Bemd*

The **Fietscommunity Groningen** was established by the Province of Groningen to enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing among cycling-related parties, and to promote cycling in the region further.

*Interviewee: Jolanda Langeland*

The **Rotterdamse Fietsalliantie ('Rotterdam Cycling Alliance')** is a partnership between the local authorities, businesses, organisations, and clubs. These organisations want to see more cycling in the city, each with their own reasons for doing so. A greener city, fewer cars, less parking pressure, better health, and greater sustainability. They work together to strengthen the cycling culture in Rotterdam.

*Interviewee: Ellery Landheer*

**Vrienden op de Fiets ('Friends on Bikes')** is a concept that allows cyclists and hikers to stay overnight in people's homes for a small fee. There is an extensive network of overnight addresses in the Netherlands (and abroad). The concept is organised by the Vrienden op de Fiets Foundation.

*Interviewee: Stefanie Gerwers*

**Doortrappen Community ('Keep Cycling Community')** is a network of professionals (provinces, local governments, physiotherapists, the Cyclists' Union, community sports coaches, sports clubs, and others) involved in the Doortrappen program: cycling safely into your 100s. Among other things, meetings are organised for these partners. This is organised by the national office operating under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management.

*Interviewee: Juul van Rijn*

**Olga's Racefietsclub ('Olga's Race Cycling Club')** is a cycling club for residents of the Oosterparkwijk neighbourhood in Groningen. In addition to bike rides, the club offers introductory training sessions for people who want to try road cycling, and provides free loan bikes for this purpose.

*Interviewee: Pascal Aandewiel*

**Fietscommunity Zwolle ('Bicycle community Zwolle')** is a collaboration between (commercial) parties and the local government. Meetings are organised to share knowledge and encourage collaboration between different parties.

*Interviewee: Erna Jansen*

The **Fietshuis in Den Bosch ('Den Bosch Cycling Centre')** is a meeting place where bicycle repairs can be done with assistance, cycling lessons are offered, and other cycling activities are organised. It is located in the Copernikkel community centre in the Boschveld neighbourhood.

*Interviewee: Jochem Kromhout*

**Kopgroep Speedpedelec ('Speed Pedelec Breakaway Group')** is a lobby group that emerged from the Facebook group "Speedpedelec Nederland." Kopgroep is working on establishing a theme and expert group for 'Speedpedelec' within the Cyclists' Union. They advocate for better regulations for the speed pedelec, particularly regarding its position on the road. In addition, they provide information on purchasing and riding a speed pedelec.

*Interviewee: Martin de Vries*