

PROMOTION/ **AWARENESS RAISING**

## BIKE EVENTS AND FESTIVALS

### Overview

Since everybody loves a party, a bike festival is a good way to attract positive attention to bicycling. Bike events and festivals serve as a fun way to get people interested in cycling and to give them a hands-on experience with bikes and bicycling. Festivals and events – whether small or large scale – should be fun, participatory events that allow you to connect with potential cyclists and to educate them at the same time as they're being entertained.

### Background and Objectives

#### *Definition*

A bike event or festival can take many forms, from small to large. Generally, they are family-friendly events with activities, entertainment, information, and education focused around various aspects of bicycles and cycling.

#### *Function/Objective*

Bicycle festivals and events are intended to raise the general public's awareness of bikes and cycling through a mix of entertainment, activities, and education about bicycles and cycling. By experiencing the fun of cycling and the usefulness of bicycles, people are encouraged to consider cycling themselves.

#### *Scope/Field of application*

A bike festival or event is appropriate in starter, climber, and champion cities, but could take a different form depending on the kind of city.

#### *Target group*

Potential cyclists and recreational cyclists.

### Implementation

A bike festival or event can be as simple as an organised group ride (see the good practice case Bicycle Greeting of Spring below) or as large and complex as an event for thousands of people (see the Bogota *Ciclovia* case below).

#### *Possible partnerships*

- Local cycling organisations
- Bike shops or bike suppliers
- Local administration
- Public transport provider
- Media
- Environmental and other community groups
- Schools
- Local employers

#### *Planning considerations*

##### *Venue and scale*



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The scale of your event depends on the resources you have available to carry it out, but the venue should be easy to reach by public transport and by bike.

### *Who and what should be there*

- Local cycling organisations
- Representatives of the local authority
- A few local celebrities if possible (politicians, media personalities, sports figures)
- Public transport provider (making the link between cycling and public transport)
- Community groups
- Bicycle tour operators
- Manufacturers or retailers of a range of less common bikes (recumbents, tricycles, etc.)
- Food and drink (and a pedal-powered mixer could allow people to mix their own drinks)
- Music (with electricity produced by pedal power would be great) – the audience takes turns keeping the music going
- Lots of bike parking for participants who come on their own bikes and want to walk around
- Bikes for people to borrow who don't have their own

### *Possible activities*

You're only limited by your imagination with regard to the activities that can be offered at a bike festival or event. The main thing to keep in mind is to integrate fun with information and education. Some possibilities include:

- Short safe cycling lessons
- Group rides
- Bike decorating
- A bike parade
- A parcours (a course route set up with obstacles) for children (or adults) to learn and practise cycling skills
- Bike polo
- A fun relay race
- Unicycle riding
- Bike testing (see also: fact sheet "Bike Testing Events")
- A pedal-powered sound system for music
- A quiz with questions about cycling in your city (perhaps with a bike as a prize)

While a bike races can be exciting to watch, if you plan to have one as part of your event, you should be careful not to leave festival participants with the feeling of being pushed to one side by fast-moving bikes in the same way they are on a daily basis by fast-moving cars.

Other bike-related activities can be found at [www.mobilityweek-europe.org](http://www.mobilityweek-europe.org) and concrete examples of one city's successful Car-Free Day activities are at [www.eltis.org/study\\_sheet.phtml?study\\_id=1398&lang1=en](http://www.eltis.org/study_sheet.phtml?study_id=1398&lang1=en).

### *Promoting the event*

- Posters should be distributed widely, including at community centres, bike shops, in shopping streets, at schools and kindergartens, at the tourist information centre, etc.
- Electronic messages can be sent to groups and clubs whose members might be interested.



- Advertising can be placed on public transport vehicles.
- Make use of the local media and other means of public distribution of information. Inviting a local celebrity (e.g. a member of a local sports team, a politician) to participate in the festival or event is a good way to draw media attention and raise awareness it.
- If there are road closures, make sure the public is made aware of them, and of alternative routes they can take.

## Considerations

If possible, you should plan to make your event annual rather than a one-time event so that you can improve on it each year and watch interest and participation levels develop over time.

If there isn't currently a great deal of support for cycling in your community, holding a bicycle event or festival during European Mobility Week ([www.mobilityweek-europe.org](http://www.mobilityweek-europe.org)) in September can give your event the extra degree of legitimacy your event needs in the community or with local decision makers. It also lets your citizens know that they are participating in something larger than just a local festival.

Public streets are a great venue for a bike festival; closing off streets to motor vehicle traffic gives people a new perspective on their city by allowing them to experience it from the middle of the street without the noise and danger of speeding cars. However, in cities where bicycling is not highly valued, it may be difficult to convince decision-makers to allow you to "borrow" road space from cars. If you do succeed in doing so, you should be relatively certain that you can fill the streets with people and activity for the duration of the festival. This both gives people an idea how their streets can be used if they aren't full of cars, and also prevents opponents from questioning the fact that you took space that "belongs" to cars. If your event is popular and successful, nay-sayers will have little support.

### *Strengths*

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- You can reach a large number of people at one time.
- A festival is a great venue to inform and educate people at the same time as they're having fun.
- Hands-on experience is the best form of promotion.
- It brings various members of the cycling community together in one place as a resource for potential cyclists.
- It's fun.

### *Weaknesses*

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- It can be a lot of work to organise and is fairly labour-intensive.
- It can be an expensive activity, depending on the sponsorship and/or other support you are able to generate.
- The success of such events is usually weather-dependent.

### *Success factors and barriers*

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- Make sure your event is well advertised – success depends on the number of people you attract.
- Don't underestimate the value of food and drink and music! These are the things that create a fun atmosphere and encourage people to stay longer.
- Do your best to reach more than "the usual suspects." You should try to appeal to those who don't cycle – or who don't cycle regularly – as opposed to those who currently do.
- The event should probably be free of charge. Although charging participants could help recover some of the costs, in places where cycling is not yet highly valued, the cost barrier could be enough to prevent people from attending.

### Evaluation of impact

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Count the number of participants. This can be done at each individual activity and/or an overall count at the festival or event. It can also be done with something small and appealing like a bike stamp on participants' hands or a wristband such as are used at festivals. If you have volunteers stamping hands or putting on wristbands (and counting), you can count the total number of attendees and can be relatively certain you haven't counted people twice.

## Good Practice Cases

### Case 1

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#### **Ciclovia – Bogota (Colombia)**

*Ciclovia* is the Spanish word for bike path, but its meaning has expanded to include a temporary closing of the street to automobiles to allow dominance by other users. Every Sunday and holiday from 7 am to 2 pm, the main streets of Bogota (and Cali and Medellin and other Colombian cities) are blocked off for *ciclovias*. The streets become car-free and are open to bicyclists, runners, and skaters and stages are set up in city parks where aerobics instructors, yoga teachers and musicians lead people through various performances. In Bogota, 2 million people (30% of citizens) regularly fill the more than 120 km of car-free streets.



*Ciclovias* have taken place in Bogota since 1976, but in recent years, the idea has begun to spread to other parts of the world, including New York City; Melbourne, Australia; Mexico City; and Quito, Ecuador. Similar events with different names take place in other places, such as Germany's Tal-to-Tal (Total Valley), where a section of road on both sides of the Rhine River are opened up to bicycles and other non-motorised traffic for a weekend in the summer.

It can be seen as a revival of the car-free Sundays that took place in many parts of Europe during the 1970s, but with the purpose of giving the streets to people (as opposed to reducing fuel consumption). By taking road space usually reserved for cars and opening it up to bicycles and other non-motorised modes, *ciclovias* can serve as a visible commitment to increasing cycling in a city.

Watch a video on the Bogota *ciclovia* here: [www.streetfilms.org/ciclovia](http://www.streetfilms.org/ciclovia) or on New York's first *ciclovia* here: [www.ibiketo.ca/blog/2008/08/11/new-yorks-first-ciclovia-success](http://www.ibiketo.ca/blog/2008/08/11/new-yorks-first-ciclovia-success)

Bogota is a starter city with a cycling modal split of 3.2% (in 2003), up from 0.8% in 1995.

Picture: by ShareAlike 2.0 from Flickr

### Case 2

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#### **Bicycle Greeting of Spring – Poznan (PL)**

According to Polish folk tradition, the Slavic goddess Marzanna symbolises winter and should be drowned (or burned) on the first day of spring to welcome the new spring and bury the old winter.

In Poznan, the City Cyclists' Division uses the occasion of the first day of spring to celebrate cycling and to encourage people to get on their bikes. Thus, every year, on the weekend closest to the first day of spring, up to 200 local





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cyclists gather, decorate their bikes, ride together through the city centre, and then throw a representation of Marzanna into the Warta River (with a rope attached to it so as not to pollute the river).

To send a message to their local politicians, each year, Marzanna also represent a problem connected with cycling in Poznan that needs to be overcome. In the past, Marzanna has symbolised the city budget with no money for bicycle paths, high kerbs, cobblestones, or traffic lights that make crossing difficult for cyclists. Representatives of the local authority usually participate in the event, making it a good opportunity to inform them about cycling concerns.



You can find out more at [www.eltis.org/study\\_sheet.phtml?study\\_id=1684&lang1=en](http://www.eltis.org/study_sheet.phtml?study_id=1684&lang1=en) or by contacting Michal Beim at [michal@srm.eco.pl](mailto:michal@srm.eco.pl).

*Poznan is a starter city with a cycling modal split of approximately 2.5-3%.*

Pictures: by Roman Fontowicz