What Manchester can learn from Berlin’s Cycling Transition

A Critical Intervention

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2. Project Aims and Objectives

Aims:
- To critically explore the specific policy mobility dynamics and feasibility of Velocity’s proposed cycling policy transfers.
- Frame further study into what, and how, Manchester can learn from other cities’ sustainable transport strategies.

Objectives:
- Investigate and document exactly how Berlin has managed to increase cycling participation in recent years.
- Investigate the current and future dynamics of cycling policy mobility between Berlin and Manchester.
- Identify and critically explore the opportunities and limitations of the proposed cycling policy transfer in the geographic context of Manchester.

3. Academic Context

The theoretical foundation of the project will build upon previous (limited) contact between the Geographical field of Comparative Urbanism and the growing multi-disciplinary study of Urban Policy Mobilities.

Comparative Urbanism

Comparative Urbanism is the ‘...systematic study of similarity and difference among cities or urban processes.’ (Nijman, 2007: 1). The comparative approach has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years; addressing critiques with a new focus on comparative conceptual frameworks and empirical parameters and a recognition of the idiosyncratic characteristics of cities (Nijman, 2007; McFarlane and Robinson, 2012).

An engagement with a comparative theoretical approach is considered particularly relevant here in exploring the feasibility of policy transfers between the two sample cities.

Urban Policy Mobility

The study of the transfer, emulation, or mutation, of policies between cities has grown in recent years in response to a noted growth in international urban policy exchanges (McCann and Ward, 2011). Many works assert the continued relevance of territorial context in policy mobility (ibid.; 2011). Whilst some pertinent examples explore the dynamic mechanisms and arrangements of policy transfer and learning between cities and their subsequent impacts (cf. Marsden et al., 2012). Despite obvious connections between this field and Comparative Urbanism (see above) (cf. McFarlane, 2010), an explicit theoretical conversation between the two has been very limited (save possibly Ward, 2010).

This project will engage with the conceptual frameworks offered in this body of work to critically explore the sampled cycling policy mobility dynamics.

4. Methodology

The data collection process will begin in May and be completed at the end of June following a two-week field visit to Berlin. The Methodology is outlined here:

Primary Data Collection: In-depth, semi-structured interviews with:

a) 2-3 TFGM/Velocity policy associates. Using open questions to establish a greater idea of specifically what TFGM intends to emulate from Berlin and their current understanding of how Berlin achieved a rapid improvement in cycling participation.

b) 8-10 policy actors associated with Berlin’s cycling proliferation: including policy consultants, city council officials, and non-governmental cycling organisations and activists.

5. Contributions and Outcomes

- A critical application of Comparative Urbanism and Urban Policy Mobility concepts to a sustainable transport and cycling policy case study.
- A qualitative academic documentation of the dynamics of Berlin’s recent cycling proliferation strategies.
- A consideration of the opportunities and limitations of the proposed cycling policy exchange between Berlin and Manchester specifically.

References


