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SOCIAL A.C.T.: Active Cycling Team

Interview report

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Methodology

Aims of the interview:

- To have a better view of cycling activity and practice in group among citizens in each community involved
- To define better the needs and expectations of the local citizens in terms of support for developing their cycling activity in group .
- Identify innovative methods to facilitate implementation of initiatives in cycling.

Structured qualitative interviews have been conducted in five project countries. The interviewed was structured with six following topics:

1- Please introduce yourself and your experience in cycling.

2- Do you prefer cycling individually or in a group?

Please justify your answer /

3- Did you practice cycling in a group?

If yes, who organized this activity? What skills you developed

If not, What keeps you from doing group cycling?

4- In your opinion, what can bring to you the practice of cycling in a group ? What are the risks to practice to cycle in group in your community?

5- What are the safety measures that you should take when you cycle in group?

6- What do you propose in order to develop the group cycling in your community

In total, there were 52 conducted individual or group interviews and the results of the main findings for each of the participating country will be presented on the following pages.

Findings by country

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, 8 interviews were conducted in total with 10 participants. Most of the participants are youngsters who had some experience with cycling in general and who in most cases ride the bike. However, some of them are passive bike riders and they said they “only know how to ride the bike”.

Most of the participants said they prefer riding a bike in a group. The most common reasons for preferring group bike riding is that they consider it as fun activity, as the opportunity to talk and communicate with friends and in general to spend some time with friends. One of the participant said the group riding is preferable because if some accident occurs, there is always someone who could help.

When it comes to participation in-group and organized cycling, the answers of participants vary. Around half of the participant said they were involved in some organized cycling events. Even, some of them were the organizers of such events. From the other side, some participants never had such experience and never participated in organized group cycling. In most cases, those participants who never been involved in organized cycling events are those who in general rarely ride a bike. Therefore, it seems that if participants is generally active bike rider, he/she also participate in some organized group cycling events.

Despite the health and other benefits of riding the bike, individually or in the group, the participants saw group cycling as an opportunity to socialize themselves additionally, but also to spend free time in a quality way. However, some participants said there are some risks of group cycling, like the clashing with cars, because there is no pavements of the roads, or sampling clashing between the riders. But, most of the participants said there is no risks or there are just some minor risks of group riding. Usually, the participants who are more experienced bike riders believe there is no risks or there are just some minor risks.

In order to minimize or even eliminate any risk, some safety measures should be taken, and most of the participants said that is necessary to wear the reflection vest, protective helmet, having headlight and stop lights. Beside of the “technical” measures, some participants also said that is important to keep the proper distance between the riders, be prepared and informed about the roads where do the ride and also watch on the road.

As suggestion for better developing group cycling in the community, participants suggested firstly to build some new bike lanes, as there is lack of them in some places, like Svishtov. Also, it is needed to work more on promotion the cycling and developing the culture of cycling. One of the way of such promotion could be also through organising different cycling events.

Greece

The interview was conducted with 17 participants and most of them are living in Lefkas. Also, the large proportion of participants are volunteers who are doing their EVS in Lefkas. Also, there were some local inhabitants who participated in this research. According to their responses, most of the participants had some experience with riding the bike, but there are some variations in the reasons for riding the bike. Some of the participants ride the bike as recreation activity, some of the used it as transportation mean and for some of them riding a bike is an opportunity to spend some time with family.

When it comes to the preference between individual and group cycling, there is no one common preference for all participants. Some of them prefer it individually and the others in a group. It seems that preference lies in the reasons for riding a bike. Those participants who use the bike as transportation mean usually prefer more to ride a bike solely, while the participants who ride the bike for the recreation or socialisation reasons prefer to ride it with the group. In addition, there are the participants who enjoyed both: individual or in a group.

“I like both of them. I like individually because you are alone with yourself, but also in a group because you keep better rhythm, there is good energy and in general cycling in a group is a very funny experience especially if it is in the nature.”

Also, it happened that some of the participants used to ride a bike individually, but then they discovered the benefits of group cycling, and consequently they changed their preference.

„I was only cycling individually, but the last year I started cycling with my friends and I think it is much better because it gives different dynamism, good energy, optimism than we are alone. But in the same time when I ride my bike alone, I enjoy my free time. „

More than a half participants participated in some organized group cycling events and most of them happened in Lefkada. In some cases, it was self-organized activity with the friends but also there were organized events from some other groups. In both cases, participants said it was great experience for them and especially because this was great opportunity to get to know more about the other people and to discover the place and the island in general.

“I believe that here in Lefkada there are beautiful places to visit and if you are in group you will enjoy more your time.”

Some of the participants said it was their way to discover more the island and inhabitants.

“Last year I participated in cycling group. It was just between the volunteers of the organization. And through this activity I learned more about the paths of the island and the about the behaviour of the others.”

Riding a bike in a group doesn't bring only opportunity to meet the places and people, but also it could help to develop some soft skills or general some competences. Some of the participants stated that cycling in a group help them to meet other people and to deepen their relationships in a positive manner.

“I guess that through the cycling in a group I developed a lot of communication. The people work in a team with the same strategy, they follow some rules and orders and they discover

their limits. Also in a group you learn how to help each other and face any problem. Cycling in a group tacked you how to share and communicate in group.”

However, despite the potential for the island and places and benefits that cycling could bring to the people and places in general, there are some risks.

Most of those risks are related to the bike lanes that usually do not exists in desired level, then with “drivers culture” who do not respect the bike riders and traffic rules. Most of the participants actually agree about those problems and risks and we can conclude it is real problem and risks that should be solved or overcome in a some way.

„Cycling in the city of Lefkada is at a very low level. The main problem is that there are no bike routes. The total number of bike routes in the city of Lefkada is about 800 to 900 meters and in specific places. This creates a big problem for older citizens who are accustomed to their bike as a means of transportation in the city and for younger people and also for athletes, as we have a club in Lefkada that deals with this sport.“

„First of all, the people are not trained to do with cyclists. The car drivers do not even notice the cyclists or the motorbikes, they don't care if you exist with your bike on the road. For example, if you are with your car and if you want to turn in a corner, you don't check from your mirror, and I had three or four times an bike accident because of this. Or an other problem is when you parked and you open the car door without checking, more than 10 times I had fallen down because of this. The car drivers do not care if they drive or park on a bike route, when I cycle with my grandson in cycling path all the time we have to stop and pass from the parked cars. The change in the car drivers behaviour has to pass through the school and the education.“

„The main risk for me there are no cycling pavements, bike routes. There are only a few of them around Marina or close to schools but nowhere else, so you have to cycle among cars in bussy roads . This is really dangerous especially when you cycle with kids. This is something which must change.“

When it comes to the safety measures that should be taken during group riding are in most cases related with before mentioned risks. Since that Lefkada doesn't have enough bike roads, the general roads are usually shared with cars, motorbikes and pedestrians and therefore special attention should be payed on cars, motorbikes but also to the pedestrians. This becomes more important if we take into account that there is no enough driving culture among car drivers and that many of them do not respect the traffic rules. One of the participants stated that also many bike riders do not know the traffic rules and therefore they also do not respect the other traffic actors. Therefore, some educational activities is needed, both for drivers and riders.

Also, those roads are damaged and special attention should be payed on that.

„First of all there are not appropriate bike roads, where normally should be prevented the use of the cars. A town like Lekfada, which is a small town and does not have mountainous masses to make cycling difficult, is suitable for cycling. Especially in the old town you can see moving cars, motorbikes. People who use their bicycle, are afraid of the increased traffic and they do not know about safety issues in the summer, too. Me, personally, I have been hit twice by car while I was riding my bicycle.“

Additionally, the normal protection for the riders should used, such is wearing helmet, reflecting lights, etc... But also could be useful if the basic repairing kit for the bike is a park of equipment.

It seems that most of the participants propose to build and develop more bike roads, even if the streets of Lefkada are narrow. Also, some of the participants suggested to prohibit the car use of some roads in the town or simply reduce the hours in which supplies of the stores in the most famous pedestrian roads could be used.

„We could also reduce the hours of supplies of the stores in the most famous pedestrian road and the supplies must be implemented only 10:00 to 12:00 in the morning. Because on the occasion of the supply of the shops, everyone enters the sidewalk, cars, motorcycles and it is very dangerous for both pedestrians and cyclists.“

Beside the infrastructure development, some of the participants suggested that education of bike riders and car drivers is necessary in order to minimise the risks and to build driving culture in the town.

Some promotional activities are also needed, for all age groups, so that every inhabitant or visitor could discover the benefits of cycling.

„Maybe the municipality could implement events monthly excursions with bikes and touch different demographic groups. For example cycling group just for women, because cycling with men some times bring a lot of sexist stereotypes. Or another group could be with teenagers or kids who start for first time to ride their bicycles. Other kind of groups could be families or groups just for sportive people because if for example you would like to cycle till Tsoukalades it is not for everybody. But from the other hand you could do this to discover the island, and just the city if you like.“

In order to promote the cycling more, organizing cycling groups and events is needed. Such activities also could help in developing sustainable tourism and also provide an opportunity for visitors to discover and explore the island from another perspective.

„Cycling in a group could be excellent promotion fro our island. A lot of people on abroad prefer their bikes, as an alternative solution of transportation and we could provide to them a different touristic package. And it is also to support more the sustainable tourism, the could come a lot of people here for mountain cycling, but we have to maintain our paths and give more to the group cycling.“

Lithuania

In total, 10 interviews were conducted. Most of the participants had experience with cycling and most of them are still active bike riders. They ride a bike for the purposes of transporting from home to work, or for the meeting with friends and spending some time with them, recreational reasons, etc...

The preferences of riding a bike (in a group or individually) varies between the participants, but still most of them prefer riding it in a group. The preferences depend of the purposes or some other conditions. So, some participants who ride a bike as transportation means (travelling to work from home) prefer do it individually, but if it is used for recreation or spending a time with friends, then group riding is more preferred. Some of the participants are aware of the risks of group cycling (accidents, attention distraction), but still they prefer group cycling.

"I like riding with other people, but it's also harder to cycle with more people, keep them in mind, not get disconnected or distracted."

Around one third of participants said they never had experience with organized group cycling and the rest usually had some experience with it. In some cases this was self-organised events between several friends and in other cases in was organised by some third parties. The experience and feelings of participants with group organized cycling vary. There were participants who experienced some accidents with group cycling and they are pointing out some risks of group cycling.

"I tried once in the Netherlands, organized by the student organization and we fell, so it wasn't such a good experience."

But also, there are the participants who participated in larger events that was secured and followed by police and where some safety measures were taken. And also, the events in which there were too many participants

"My biggest trip was "Laisves" road, from Vilnius to Medininkai with a huge group, organized by Laisves TV. I felt very safe there, there were a lot of people, but we were followed by police, everyone was wearing helmets. Previously I tried to cycle in "Critical mass" but I didn't like that event, it was too fast, too crowded, I didn't feel that safe."

Therefore, it seems that participants like group cycling only if they feel safe and secure and if it is not too crowded event.

Participants were able to list many benefits of group cycling. Most of them are connected with personality development or development of personal and social characteristics, such as multitasking, feeling of belonging to a group, communication skills, sense of communalities, socialisation, special orientation, etc...

Many of them said that cycling helped them to develop various sets of skills and abilities, both personal and social set of skills, but also, they considered it as fun activity in which they really enjoyed.

„I developed multitasking, paying attention to what's happening around me. Group cycling can bring the feeling of community, you get to know other people, you get to talk, do something together."

„It's fun, because it's an activity that lets you spend time with your friends, stay social.“

„You learn to be a team player, you have to adapt your speed, you can't go too slow or too fast. It's always very interesting to ride in a group and that common interest connects people. After a good day of cycling in a group, you feel tired but very happy and you want to do it again. „

„You learn to compromise, where to go, what to visit, you have to adapt.“

„Cycling helped me to develop different skills, strength, stamina, I learned to coordinate myself better. It's also a good tool to learn time management skills. Also, responsibility not only for myself but for other people too.“

Of course, there are some risks of group cycling and cycling in general, and participants are aware of those risks. For most of them, falling from a bike or car accident is the biggest risk of group cycling.

In order to prevent such accidents or to minimise the possible damage, participants said that some safety measures should be taken.

Most of them are connected with appropriate dresses and equipment such as wearing a helmet, safety vest, having brake lights, etc.. but also they consider as very important to respect some rules in group cycling, such as navigating the group, showing direction signs, paying attention to surroundings and other people. Also, it is important to know your own abilities and boundaries, and to bring enough water, sun cream, and avoid wearing headphones.

It seems that a large proportion of participants of this research believe that cycling is a developed activity in Lithuania, especially if it compares with other countries that participated in this research. Therefore, the advice for developing group cycling in Lithuania differs a bit from other countries.

Therefore, some of the participants propose to have better promotion of group cycling, organising shorter tours that are not demanding so that everyone can participate, then organising various types of group cycling: city tours and/or mountain tours.

Also, some group cycling could be organised around some tourist attraction.

„Would be nice if there could be more interesting routes, cycling joint with sightseeing activities, where people could learn about the history, different places in the city.“

However, there are still some people who do not know how to ride a bike, or the people who are not very familiar with cycling. Therefore, some educational activities or the workshops should be organised.

“There could be people who can do workshops on which bike to use for different cycling, how to fix your bike, or even how to ride a bike because there are still many people who don't know how to ride a bike. „

Promotional activities using various communication and media channels also could be used more in order to promote this activity among the general population and make it more attractive to the people.

„There should be more events and they have to be more advertised, people need to know that these events are happening. More awareness needs to be there for the general public. Sometimes you see a group of people cycling together, or even a big cycling event and you didn't even know that it is happening.“

Portugal

There were four conducted interviews in Portugal in total and each of them are familiar with cycling. There are the participants who are amateur cyclist but also the participants who were the professionals. One of the participants was even competing on international level and one of the them currently lead the cycling school and is coach and delegate of Azorean Cycling Association.

When it comes to the preferences of cycling, individually or in a group, participants usually prefer both and they do both. However, in some situations they prefer do it individually, if they train themselves or want to have their own rhythm, or they do group cycling if they want to develop their skills in a more fun way.

“I do it both ways. During the week, I practice alone, with training plans with specific goals created to help me for competition. On Saturdays, I train with anyone that is available and on Sundays I always ride with my team. We are a group of around 10 or 15 people and we all get together for a 3 to 5 hour session every Sunday. „

There are some benefits doing it in a group, as in most cases it is connected with spending some time with friends, enjoying the view, sightseeing, etc...

“In a group, I did sightseeing, counterclock, racing each other from point A to B. But most of all just hanging out, enjoying the view and going off road with our bicycle. I think it’s always interesting to bond with a group. I have a few friends that I only see when riding. So, yes, I would say group bonding (as the main skill).“

Those who do it as professionals usually have a bit different reasons for preference as the selection of individual or group cycling is usually depended of some specific training goal.

„In the group activity that I do, we are focused on practicing physical endurance, so that we are ready for competition. During these sessions, we ride around the island, but also practice specific cycling techniques, such as, front leaders or climbing challenges. On Sundays, we also promote team building and helping each other through the “suffering” that is typical in cycling. But it’s a good kind of suffering, as we cultivate friendship. Our club also implements a lot of activities, since we have a school for cycling, where young people work on very technical aspects, like riding, breaking, balance, climbing ramps, leading the group. Essentially, activities catered to young learners.“

The benefits of group cycling can be on individual level but also it could help to the communities to develop. So, if there are an opportunities to organise bigger events, it could help to community to develop more.

“This would be, of course, a very positive thing for our community, if it were possible to make bigger and better groups to practice this sport.“

On the other side, group cycling has some risks that should be taken into account.

„However, a lot of measures would have to be taken, because, here, we don’t have a lot of (bikeways), bike rentals and other logistic, materials and measures put in place to make cycling safer in large groups. „

Some of the participants think that group cycling has less risks than individual cycling as they believe that if accident happen in a group, there will be always the people who are with you and who could help or assist you, while if you are alone, usually you depend only about yourself.

Some risks of group cycling are the same as for the individual cycling and therefore we cannot say that those risks are connected only with group cycling.

“On the island, we face the same risks anyone faces: the lack of respect for the cyclers, whether it’s someone training or someone commuting to work or other regular activity.”

„We have lived crazy situations, like being assaulted, run over by cars. I don’t believe that anyone would hit us on purpose, but these happen, and we have had actually two members that had to be surgically operated.“

Some safety measures are necessary in order to prevent accidents and unwanted situations, which actually always can occur.

Firstly, when riding in a group, people should try to be visible for the others, for the cars and to be well signalled for the group and to be seen from a great distance. Also, people should be keep the same pace in a group and need to take care of anyone else on the road and to watch on everyone in the group, especially if there are some children and people with some medical conditions or a lesser lung capacities. Finally, it is also important to build good bond between the group members.

Cyclist should also take a care if they are using the road incorrectly. They should be aware that they share the road with other cyclist, cars and pedestrians. Therefore, some promotional activities among the population is needed as the some rules are not respecting from anyone or any group of population. O that line, it would be good if some educational activities are organized even in school and even with parents of the kids, as the parents are usually the first role models for their kids. In schools, cycling should be organised as special subject and should become the part of the school curricula. Also, in driving school, people should have to learn more about cycling.

“I think we should have cycling classes in physical education, promoting also the sport itself, and involving the National Federation for Cycling (that already does a lot, but has a lot of projects that don’t come to implementation or don’t have the desired impact). It would have to involve all children and also cycling schools. All kids have bicycles, so we have to use that to work with them. Have the clubs and associations go to schools to talk to children about how to use the roads responsibility. In addition, clubs could be more encouraged and supported to actually have training for young people available.“

With the purpose of developing group cycling is also building some infrastructure such are bikeways and creating safer ways for people to be together while practising this sport. Also, promoting of cycling is very important. And this could be done through organizing events in which people could ride safely, or to ride with family and children.

“I would promote cycling. I would organize events, where people could ride safely. I would try to find ways where you could ride even with children. I would organize events where children could start to develop cycling skills. And also adults that don’t know how to cycle. So I would organize events in a safe way, in a safe place, where you could help, assist, and spend good time with people, cycling. I would create conditions to help people ride a bicycle, because later on these people could start using on their own to get to work, to get a healthier lifestyle. This would be a win-win situation. „

“Since we have an older population, there are a lot of young people riding and we have many beautiful, green scenarios close to the sea, so we could host more activities. This would promote healthier lifestyles and help older people become less sedentary. “

Turkey

In total, there were 13 conducted interviews in Turkey. All of the interviewed participants are active bike riders, some of them are the members of various cycling clubs or organisation and some of them are also founders of such clubs or organisation. The common thing for the most of participants is that they do like cycling and they do it almost on a daily basis.

Almost every single participant said that he/she preferred cycling in a group but also individually. Preference depends on many reasons and it seems if the bike is used as transportation means, then person prefer to ride it individually, while in some other situations, like spending a time with friends, they prefer do it in groups.

"It is okay for me to ride the bike both in a group and individually. If I use cycling for sports purposes, I prefer to use it as a group or if I use it for transportation I prefer to use as a single."

Also, the preference depends on the conditions or surroundings. In a situation where the visibility of the cyclist is not ensured, some participants prefer do it in a group as the group is more visible than an individual person. In that terms, group somehow provide better safety for the cyclist.

"I think that individual cycling is more convenient for daily cycling to go where ever you want to go, but in crowded cities like Istanbul, if you have a Road partner who share the same route with you, I could prefer that too, I feel that I became more visible and safe within the traffic when I am in a small group."

"I prefer cycling in a group with my other cyclist friends, and I think cycling in a group is less risky than cycling individually."

Those who prefer group cycling, usually like to do in a small groups (up to seven people), because in the larger groups could occur a lot of imbalances which creates the stressful situations for the cyclists, and doing it in a smaller groups can provide the feeling of belonging and sharing.

"...if you are in big a group, then a lot of imbalances occur in a group. Sometimes this can create some stress rather than enjoyment. But on the other hand being in a group is a really nice feeling which give you the feeling of belonging and sharing."

"Because cycling with a small group is less stressful than big groups. And, sharing cycling moments is with a small group is more enjoyable, safe. Also, we are more easy and quick organized."

Most of the participants participated and still participating in various group cycling events, usually through their cycling clubs or organisations. Some of them are even organizers including the events with around 300 people, and some of them do it not just inside the Turkey but also on international level. Therefore, we can conclude that our participants are not just active cyclist, but they are actively working on organising cycling events and also participating in them.

Cycling in a groups have some risks, as the riding individually. The most common risks of group cycling is clashing two bicycles, crashing or falling down from a bike. Those accidents usually happens if cyclist are not careful about the traffic and surrounding, if they do not respect some basic rules, if they do not follow the leader, etc... Still, group cycling for many is even more secure than individual cycling.

"I think cycling in a group is less risky but still in a group activity you should take security measures."

However, group cycling has much more benefits than the risks.

The group cycling can bring harmony as you need to follow the other cyclist and keep the distance. It is healthy and have positive impact not just on the cyclists' body and personality, but also for the environment in general. Group cycling motivates people on action and help them to improve the knowledge about bikes. It brings joy, fun, support, trust, friendship and also improve the attention and focus. It develop social capital, create new connections, promote equity and build team spirit.

"It is a good way to meet new riders and socialize with them. You can easily find riders who are eager to share their knowledge, experiences and ideas. You can learn how to work in cooperation and feel more confident day by day."

"Cycling with a group is a chance to share experience and that's making me happy when I meet people that love and it's good to be making new connexion because we are a little community in turkey. "

"... cycling together can bring a person a lot of self-confidence. Since it is an individually made sports, it gives a lot of freedom. You have the control... but on the other hand you have to show your love and respect to others. It gives you a lot of power of belonging to the society. So these are very important things for a group activity. And the other important thing that group ride can bring is the feeling of equality... no matter what your profession and position are at your work, you are a very simple person there gathered together with a group of people for the same purpose: cycling. So, no ambition and power works there.. Besides all more green environment. economic, gives happies, and allows you to move. Physical and mental health purposes. "

In general, there are many benefits that group cycling can bring to the individuals and those benefits are not just personal, but also it help a lot to the communities.

In order to avoid the accidents and minimise the risks of group cycling, some safety measures should be taken into consideration. In general, there are two groups of such measures: technical, in terms of wearing a proper dresses and security equipment and respecting some rules in a group.

Wearing helmet, having light and reflections on a bike, dressing properly and having spare equipment and the first aid kit is one the most fundamental safety measures that each cyclist should ensure. Also, it is important that bike is technically prepared for the ride. Each cyclist should check the brakes and other parts of the bike before the ride.

"A well-maintained bicycle that will not cause any problems until the end of the trip; and repair kit... What everyone should have helmet, gloves, goggles, reflective clothing, back and front lighting."

During a ride, traffic rules must be respected such is using hand signals to warn the group members against the objects on road which could cause the accidents, keeping a proper distance between the others, holding the line and follow the rhythm.

In a group activities, it is recommended to have experienced cyclist in the front and in the back, but also, the cyclist should be informed about the track or route before starting the ride.

“To avoid these risks, I believe the communication between the lead and the rear is essential. It prevents several risks at once. Another measure is to assign some cyclists to keep waiting the alley traffic. And to inform all the cyclists before at the beginning about some basics of the group ride, the route, the importance of the distance with the others during the ride etc.”

When it comes to the suggestions about developing group cycling, one of the first priorities is the build or construct more biking roads. Even if there are some roads, they are not completely safe roads for cyclists. And it seems that safe roads for cyclist are usually far away from the cities centres.

“More cycling safety lanes needed for both individual and group cycling.. When these infrastructure is better, then more people will cycle and will have a better healthy, happy and green World. “

Promotional and educational activities are also necessary to do more and organizing some events that are not too expensive for participations.

Do you prefer cycling individually or in a group?



Did you practice cycling in a group?



What can bring to you the practice of cycling in a group ? What are the risks to practice to cycle in group in your community?



What are the safety measures that you should take when you cycle in group?



