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GEOG 315 - Section AC

Integrating Bike Infrastructure into Urban Cities: Does it contribute to a more Progressive, but Privileged Social Environment?

My topic is on how most cities of high population density have adapted their landscape to become more bike-friendly. This contributes to how the cities are progressing towards better environmental sustainability and transportation services amidst more people living in the city and coming in and out of it. This also brings various downsides to it such as an economic shift to benefit more of a higher middle class and issues of drivers having to share the road with bikers. The purpose of this research is to get a better understanding of the missing perspective of the low-income/ people of color demographic when it comes to their residence becoming bike-friendly. I investigate the effects of this phenomenon on multiple urban cities, to assess the current bike movement in the city of Seattle.

The first argument is about how making neighborhoods in cities more bike-friendly has contributed towards the gentrification of these areas to appeal to a more wealthier socioeconomic class. Building in bike infrastructure is made to be a political move by cities to invest more towards an economic booming area. This entails to the low to middle classes to stray away from the expensive costs of living at their current residence, to make room for the wealthier

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demographic to take over. This purposeful move by cities have started a progression towards spatially restructuring their areas to “employment deconcentration, rising urban core rents, and new-build exurban growth driven by the housing bubble combined to propel the ‘suburbanization of poverty’ a key feature of the current boom.” The integration of bikes being a normalized form of transportation in the cities have complemented well with the other appealing demands cities have developed. From the growth of the high paying job market and more expensive housing, this constitutes more luxurious living styles that many locals wouldn’t be able to afford. (Stehlin, 2014, p. 123).

In the case for many modern urban cities in the U.S., there is a growing number of young educated professionals becoming attracted to the cycling culture spreading throughout the city. While traditionally a bicycle would be the last resort form of transportation for those who can’t afford a motorized vehicle, that has shifted to be “...adopted for recreation by the affluent and for transportation by environmentally and socially conscious millennials” (Flanagan *et al.*, 2016, p. 15). This group of individuals would tend to care more about their environment to promote a better living style of the rest of the city. Logically, cities must provide sufficient opportunities for the gentries, so they can exponentially grow economically as a whole.

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But, what about the wellbeing of the existing residents? Throughout all of this, people who lived in these neighborhoods who were at-risk were not financially and socially fit to stay in their hometown. There was no sympathy towards the current residence when the city decides how to better develop their area. Older and deteriorating housing was replaced with "...parking lots, stadiums, and ill-fated high-rise public housing," which caused the "...urban neighborhoods to become design products rather than lived places" (Isenhour *et al.*, 2015, p. 307). That group of people tend to use the common forms of transportation such as bus or car, and now they have to tolerate sharing the same roads with the people who are seamlessly taking over their area.

Integrating bike infrastructure is an expensive investment that cities have to gamble with its money. But, where is all that money coming from? From property to vehicle taxes, even people who don't bike on the installed bike lanes or don't approve of it, have to pay towards having it take a part of their roads. Especially in Seattle, where a \$56 million project was invested towards safer bike routes that were influenced by the hefty amount of collisions between cyclists and vehicles (Enlow, 2015). A lot of bicycling accidents on the road comes from how cyclists don't have to obtain a license or become experienced enough to get on the streets, just the exact thing all the motorists have to do to ride on the same road. With the biking demographic aimed towards young, liberal-minded people of all various experiences on the road; they also gain new opportunities from the city to exercise their niche activity.

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That is in the form bike movements and bike awareness programs that has boosted the value of bicycles as luxuries, on the same level of cars. People who advocate alternative forms of transportation are in agreement for a "...systematic way to break the multigenerational chains of autocentrism and really broaden America's transportation palate" (Suraci, 2017, p. 76). Here is another special treatment granted onto bicyclists, thanks to striving urban cities that believe that bicycling is the future to better things for their area. What else the take over of bike-enabled infrastructure does for the streets is that it displaces people with poor vehicles from using the road. Bicyclists may seem more vulnerable than cars on the road, but with protected bike lanes they are able to take over the streets from their car counterparts. Especially, when it comes to reality that "...urban design practice in the USA goes hand-in-hand with gentrification and the displacement of poor 'People of Colour' by richer white hipsters on fixed-gear bikes" (Matthews, 2015, p. 747). That again proves that cyclists have benefited from the safe haven that are urban cities.

There is also a reciprocal benefit of bicyclists to the cities that open their streets to them. Ever since the development of public bike systems, governments and companies are profiting from the craze of being able to inexpensively ride a bike on the road without having to buy their own bike. Urban cities have either grown or rejuvenated their bike networks thanks to rental bikes, especially in China where they once known as the "kingdom of bicycle" (Yang *et al.*,

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2015, p. 176). The Chinese government had recently committed to have public bike systems be as big as public transit systems as they invested “...government cash of 1.45 billion RMB (US\$234 million) and a government revenue-backed loan of 2.6 billion RMB (US\$422 million)” and they are now the “biggest public bike system in the world” (Yang *et al.*, 2015, p. 178). It wasn’t a surprise that many highly populated U.S. cities adopted mass production of bike sharing systems to benefit financially like China did, and it will continue to grow as more and more cities grow from integrating more bicycle shares.

Governments and cyclists do truly benefit from the phenomenon of bicycling being a form of transportation, but what about the rest of the citizens? Those who tend to benefit from bike infrastructure are affluent as the “lowest US income quartile actually used bikes for a larger share of their trips (1.3%)...” and “In 2010, non-Hispanic whites (66% of the US population) made 77% of all bike trips” (Lubitow *et al.*, 2016, p. 2639). This has negatively affected the minority groups in these urban neighborhoods as inferior to the cyclists coming into their place and made them feel more welcome than the people who have been living there for a longer time. Such as in Humboldt Park, Chicago; the Puerto Rican community has been negatively affected by the city deciding to make plans to integrate infrastructure without their input, even though they make up most of that area (Lubitow *et al.*, 2016). The cycling demographic tends to be influential when it comes to the decisions a city makes because of how much the city can grow if

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they can sway to this attractive group of people. Urban studies theorist Richard Florida coined the term “creative class” to be a “demographic marked by their desire and privileged ability to live in specific cities regardless of the career opportunities in them...” (Hoffmann *et al.*, 2014, p. 45).

The “creative class” also seems to be a superior group of people who are dominant when it comes to getting what they want. Even though they are operating a weak vehicle on the road, they make a big difference when it comes to the development of city landscapes because when they are brought in by large numbers, they make a difference. One instance in San Francisco has, “cyclists taking part in this ‘organized coincidence’ try to fill the streets with riders to demonstrate their collective solidarity and send a message to the public: ‘We are not blocking traffic; we *are* traffic!’” (Furness, 2010, p. 2). This could contribute to how many urban cities in the U.S. has adopted a progressive political ideology that appeals to cyclists coming to their city. Cities like these have strong views towards improving the environment and cycling helps to solve most of their problems. From less traffic congestion to getting people in a high density area place to place more efficiently, biking has become a highly acceptable form of transportation in many places in the U.S. and around the world. In busy and crowded cities like Copenhagen in Denmark, “...cycling attracts many practitioners because the bike infrastructure makes it easy,

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convenient, and fast” (Larsen, 2017, p. 883). Bike infrastructure since its inception, was perfectly built for urban cities to thrive and develop into powerhouse places to live in the world.

Integrating bike infrastructure into urban cities in the forms of bike lanes and routes, to meet the needs of a growing demographic, is highly political towards the decisions cities make to further develop. A big issue that arises with this is gentrification to adapt to the lifestyle of the wealthy, causing many locals to be displaced from their homes. From most of my sources, the researchers used interviews to get the viewpoint from the residents and also people who were bike advocates, to determine if adapting to bike-friendly cities was the right move or not. This issue needs to be further researched because of how recently and drastic the inception of bike infrastructure is to many urban U.S. cities, including Seattle. We currently know that **what once was a cheap form of transportation, is now a luxurious and normalized way to commute in cities that treat it like other vehicles.** But, what I want to know that hasn't been researched is, **how does low-income and/or people of color feel about/respond to their displacement due to cities' adaptation to bike infrastructure?** They are granted privileges that have made them a superior group in cities and what they do will either have a positive or negative effect on the unification of a city.

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My research is on how the development of urban U.S. cities has appealed to the more affluent and superior group of people, particularly when it comes to integrating more and better bike infrastructure. What a progressive city thinks is more environmentally sustainable by providing alternative transportation services throughout the city, has indirectly created a tool of suppressing the needs of minority groups, especially the lower income class and people of color. While there has been an economic shift to benefit more of a higher middle class, bike infrastructure has complimented that as well, as it renovates neighborhoods to become more bike-friendly and inevitably displacing struggling residents from their rising costs homes. Also, with the growth of bike culture, it doesn't fit well with minority groups as it mainly appeals to the young and educated demographic.

While I have explored the different bike movements all over the world, especially in well-populated U.S. cities; this would help me investigate the new inception of bike infrastructure in Seattle. There has been a drastic growth of bike infrastructure ever since the city has invested so much of its budget to build it up and that entailed a more luxurious lifestyle that gentries have great privileges granted to them. Historically, Seattle has been a welcoming city to all cultures, but how their decision of development through integrating bike infrastructure has affected the equity the city now offers. This has hurt the unification and integrity of the city and I

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wonder how the lower income and people of color have been affected and responded to the integration of bike-friendly neighborhoods in their residences.

The purpose of my research is to explore the nature of what the city of Seattle has done to the living environment of minority groups ever since the vast change to their neighborhoods as bicyclists now have the rights on the road. There is already a lot of information out there about how many Seattle neighborhoods have become gentrified through bike infrastructure and through this exploratory research, I want to understand the perspective of the current residents who have to witness this type of change if they like it or not. My research population are residents of lower income and/or people of color who have been affected by gentrification in their respective Seattle neighborhood. I would view the median income within a specified census tract and classify “low-income” as people in the 40% percentile and below (about \$49k a year per household). In this case, I will be investigating more specifically into the Columbia City neighborhood in the South End of Seattle. This region is within the Rainier Valley district, just east of Beacon Hill and north of Rainier Beach. The population size is unknown because there is a huge population of minorities located here that may or may not be negatively affected by the consequences of gentrification. I would have to investigate the census data for this neighborhood to identify the population size for people who are identified as a minority.

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My units of analysis are individuals, as stated in my research question, I want to focus on how low-income groups and people of color react to this kind of development in their neighborhoods. With more and more Seattle neighborhoods becoming gentrified, there should be analysis towards these individuals to see if these affluent groups are actually taking over. My units of observation are individuals in these minority groups that are affected by the integration of bike infrastructure as a form of gentrification. I would like to observe their attitude towards this situation, either if they feel more inferior with more affluent people taking over their area or if they still have a sense of belonging with their unique cultures that keep them united. My sampling type is non-probability with the strategy used being purposive sampling. I would like to get in touch and interview people who were directly affected by this phenomenon and have some sort of opinion on it. I would try to see if there are dedicated community members who are active in the development of their neighborhood, probably through community centers or community meetings of some sort. If that isn't available in reality, I would provide a short survey through mail for potential people who have a first hand experience about this situation.

My preferable sample size is in the range of 10-25 individuals who are represented towards a particular minority group in the area. Getting in touch with such people would be tough in reality, but I really want a substantial amount of information to determine conclusions that are diverse and don't lean towards a clear bias. My mode of observation is interviews,

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possibly leaned towards semi-structured interviews. I think the questions I ask towards the interviewee should be more open-ended so they can be more comfortable sharing how they truly feel about their neighborhood developing against them and allow them the freedom to share what they want. With this being sensitive and personal information, I don't want to force my participants to answer questions they aren't comfortable talking about.

My direct observables are age and race to put them into a demographic of their representative group. My indirect observables I would identify from the interview are their income range and how long they have been living in their home in the designated neighborhood. My construct observables are their sense of belonging in their neighborhood and their comfortability in sharing the roads and neighborhoods with the new wave of bicyclists. My levels of measurement would be mainly nominal because what the participants would respond with will be different from each other but there's no numerical difference between the attributes. The only variables I see being ordinal are income range because it's ranked in order and the ratio variables would be age and how long they have been living in the neighborhood. My choices are valid because I believe that these variables would accurately measure and depict the current state of the groups of individuals I'm choosing to study. But, my choices are also not that reliable because I don't think the results I get back from the interviews would be the same throughout time. At this time, I do not have my independent, dependent, and control variables determined.