

# Untold Kings of a Growing Online Bicycle Community. Converting online communities into offline critical mass

Custom bicycle constructors are able to engage others in emphasizing their cultural capital. In Bucharest (Romania) they are “untold kings” of a growing online community. Under a gentrified approach on urban cycling, I argue that solid bicycle infrastructures can be achieved by converting these online communities into offline critical mass.

## CONTEXT



The Municipality has spent over 10 million euros for bicycle lanes. Some of them look like this.

- 40 bicycle lanes built between 2001-2012 in Bucharest; 122 km in total.
- The majority are placed on the pavement.
- Currently disbanded for lack of safety
- New plans for placing the future ones **again** on the pavement.
- 20% of respondents of a national survey 'don't use the bicycle as a means of transportation because of lack of bicycle lanes.

## BICYCLE BUILDERS AND RESTAURATORS



Andrei's ratbike, a motorized bicycle. Many of the bicycle builders in Bucharest are also activists.

- My master thesis in Anthropology focused on the **DIY bicycle culture in Bucharest.**
- MA thesis ethnographic research results: bicycle builders are not mere trend-setters among gentrified bicyclists, but they can also muster cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) likely to cause changes in urban mobility policies.

## HUMAN INFRASTRUCTURE

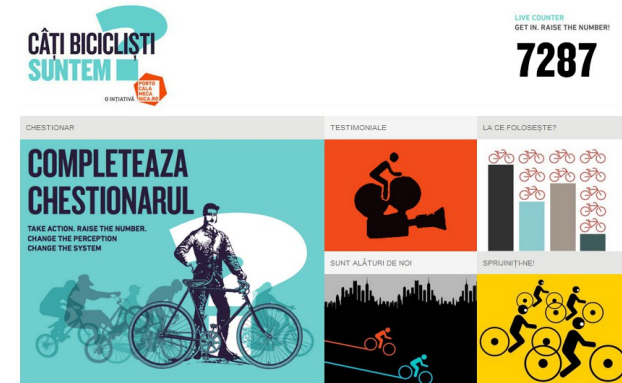
- In contrast with the physical infrastructure (the bicycle lanes), there is the **human infrastructure** (Lugo, 2012). It is relational [and] can build networks across the community-defined lines that physical infrastructure might reproduce.
- Examples of human infrastructure in cycling include **group rides** that create temporary spaces where this practice becomes normal, online communities where riders share knowledge, shared understandings of road use, and bike repair cooperatives.



A recent bicycle protest in Bucharest.

## ONLINE BICYCLISTS CENSUS

- Lugo's human infrastructure can also be understood through the lenses of **Actor-Network Theory** (Latour, 2005), where a network (a cycling network in Bucharest, in this case) is assembling different materialities such as online platforms.
- In the spring of 2013 I launched an **online census** to get a fairer picture of our ever-growing community in Bucharest.
- The hope is that a physical infrastructure (an official online census made by the authorities) might reproduce this type of human infrastructure.



The online platform 'How many cyclists are we?' offered an online survey completed by more than 7.000 participants.