

Elements of cycling

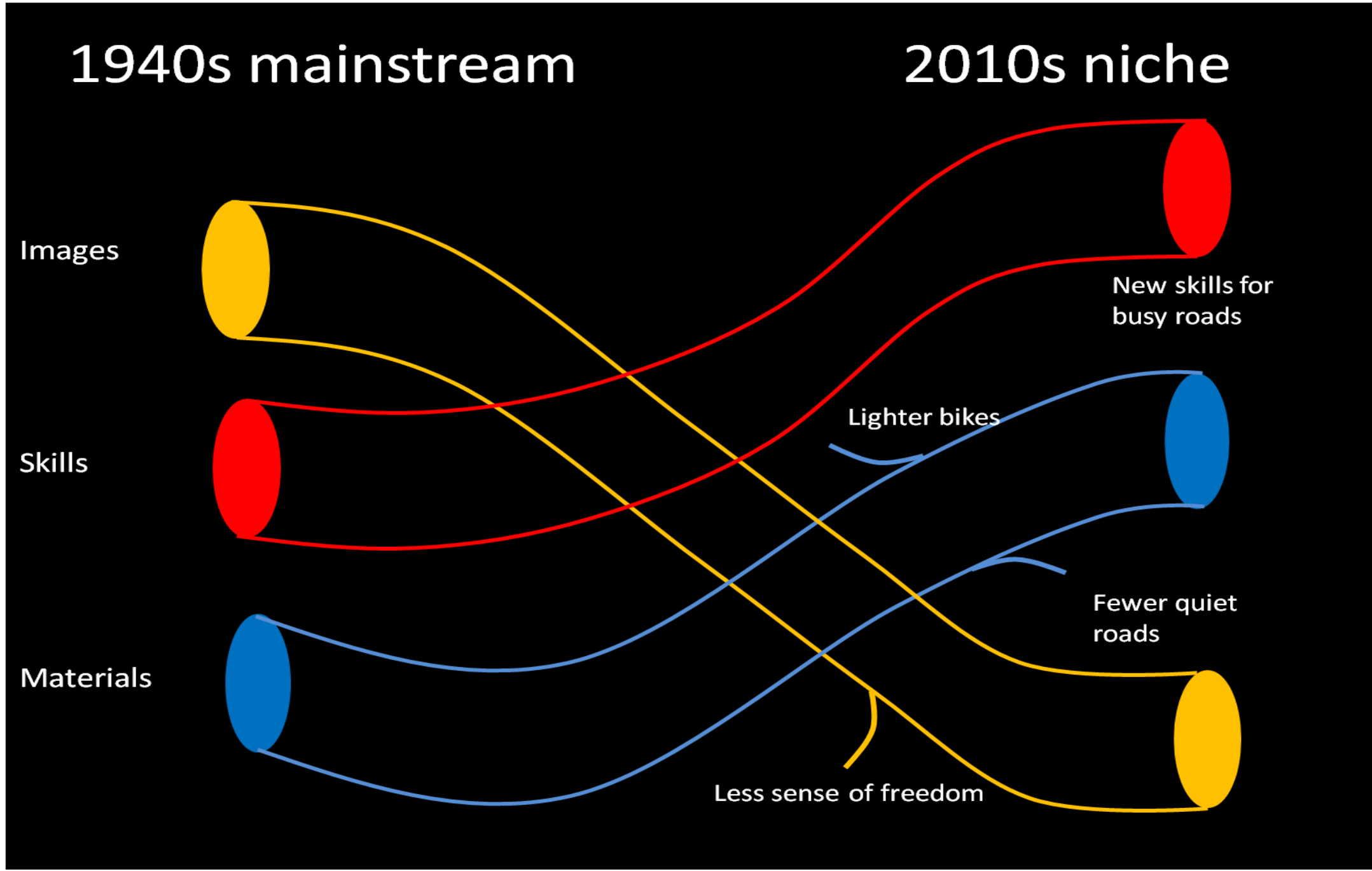
Emergence, disappearance, transformation

Practices like cycling involve the integration of elements including images and meanings, skills, materials and objects.

- ✱ Rates and types of cycling reflect the emergence, disappearance and transformation of these defining elements.
- ✱ Patterns of cycling depend on when and how such elements are combined.
- ✱ Different combinations of elements produce different genres of cycling.

	Commuting	Family leisure	Road racing	Mountain biking
Images	functional, A to B; health, money saving, fitness, way of life; perceptions of being smelly.	kids learning to ride, family bike ride, holiday, hobby, health, get out of the city, tinkering, modifying, Building.	speed, fitness, competence, macho.	fitness, adrenaline, adventure, outdoors, trendy, hobby, fun.
Skills	road awareness, puncture fixing, some Fitness.	basic levels of skills and fitness.	race etiquette, fixing skills, skills in leading and following, cycling skills.	brave, fit, strong, young, good at staying on, keeping balance.
Materials	helmets, folding bikes, high visibility clothing, waterproofs, mudguards, lights, panniers, baskets, rucksack, cycle routes, cycle racks, showers, flat areas, shorter distances.	family bike rack, basket, different style of bike, stabilisers, trailer or kids tandem, picnic and thermos, safe routes, bikes for kids.	speed bikes, water bottles, lycra padded bottoms, clip on shoes, helmet, clubs, 'cycling weekly', races, raybans, timer.	mountain bike, baggy shorts, gloves, rack on car, gloves, off road track, goggles, repair kit, hills, information about routes, rucksacks.

The elements of which cycling is made are themselves dynamic. Images and meanings of cycling change as driving increases. Different skills are required. New materials are introduced.



	1940s commuting	2010s commuting
Images	Efficient, normal, freedom, independence for young people, part of leisure, work, shopping, and sport. Common to make long as well as short journeys by bike.	Risky (many cars), healthy, sweaty, distinctive identity (not normal), quick (compared to car for some journeys). Different from leisure biking.
Skills	Ability to ride, and to fix and maintain the bike.	Riding and road sense.
Materials	Heavy durable bikes, baskets, quiet roads, no specialised clothing.	Special gear, dedicated cycle lanes, better technology, busy roads.



In the UK in the 1940s, 20% of men’s journeys to work were by bike.

Pooley, C. and Turnbull, J. (2000). "Modal choice and modal change: the journey to work in Britain since 1890." *Journal of Transport Geography*.



City	2001 census % cycling to work	Mode share %
Cambridge	28	18
York	13	10
Shrewsbury	6	3
Bristol	5	3
Lancaster, Exeter, Derby, Colchester	4ish	4ish

UK 2001, from Cycling England

Commitment emerges from participation. “Little by little the character of the bike gets into your backbone. Your posture on the bike is perfected. I would not sell a good bike. On a ride the bike is like a silent companion.” (interview by Mikko Jalas).



In promoting cycling to work, policy makers would do well to ask:

- ✱ What images and meanings, skills, materials and objects are involved in cycle commuting?
- ✱ How are these elements distributed and integrated?
- ✱ How does cycling relate to other practices?
- ✱ Which elements are shared, and which are in conflict ?

How do practices disappear?

Levels of cycling declined in many European cities in the 1960s. In some places they are starting to rise again. In others there is no sign of recovery.

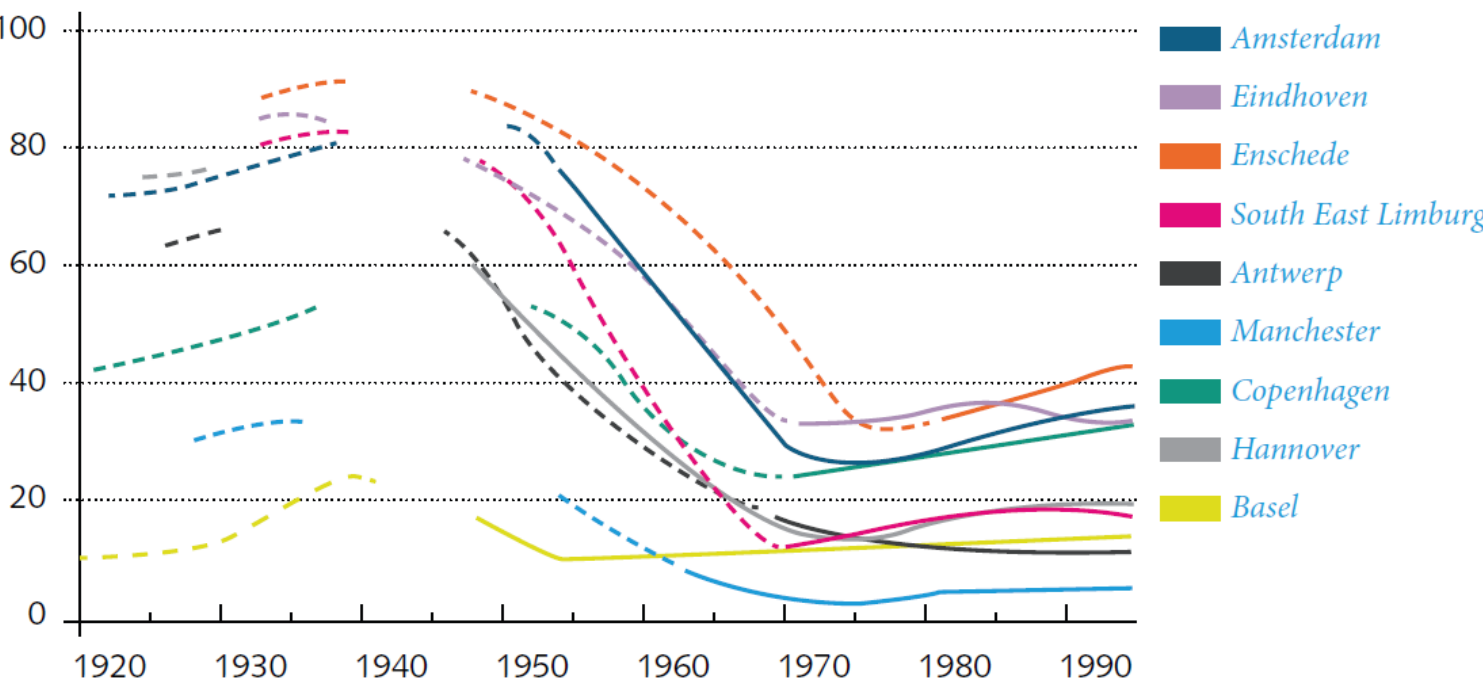


Figure 5: Historical development in bicycle share in 9 European cities Source: A.A.ALbert de la Bruheze and F.C.A. Vervaaert. Bicycle traffic in practice and policy in the twentieth century, 1999

In the UK today less than 2% of all journeys are made by bike, compared to 27% in the Netherlands.

Have the elements and practices of cycling been more comprehensively obliterated in the UK than in the Netherlands?

Are there thresholds of disappearance: points beyond which dormant images, skills and materials of cycling cannot be revived?