



Cycling to Shopping – Evidence from Research

Underestimated potential in shopping

Against the backdrop of rising energy prices and changing lifestyles, more and more people are using the bicycle for their day-to-day trips. Emission-free mobility on two wheels is becoming increasingly important for shopping as well. According to the nationwide traffic survey 'Mobility in Germany 2008', already 11 % of shopping trips are made by bike.

However, retailers, city marketing offices and local politicians are still often somewhat sceptical when it comes to the buying power of cycling customers. Traditionally, shops and their surrounding are geared towards the needs of motor-vehicle users. Large parking spaces and quick car access are considered to be success factors for retail locations. However, it is often ignored that cycling customers constitute a growing market segment with strong purchasing power and that failing to provide cycle-friendly shopping conditions deters potential customers.

Research: Taking customers on bikes more seriously

Several national and international studies show how lucrative it can be for the local retail sector to establish medium-term loyalty with cycling customers. Even though cycling customers carry just a few kilograms of purchased goods back home after a shopping visit, they

do visit local shops more often than customers coming by car.

The results of a study conducted by Georg Gumpinger (2010) showed that, in Austria, 80 % of bicycle users shop at local businesses several times a week, whereas only 68 % of car users do so. Cyclists are renowned for being very loyal customer. According to a study from the Netherlands and France, the overall higher frequency of visits to shops by cyclists (123 shopping days by car, 148 shopping days by bike) enables higher revenues.

Today's cyclists are by no means less affluent customers who cannot afford a car. A customer survey conducted in Kiel revealed that two thirds of customers shopping

Cover image: City Centre of Leuven (Belgium)
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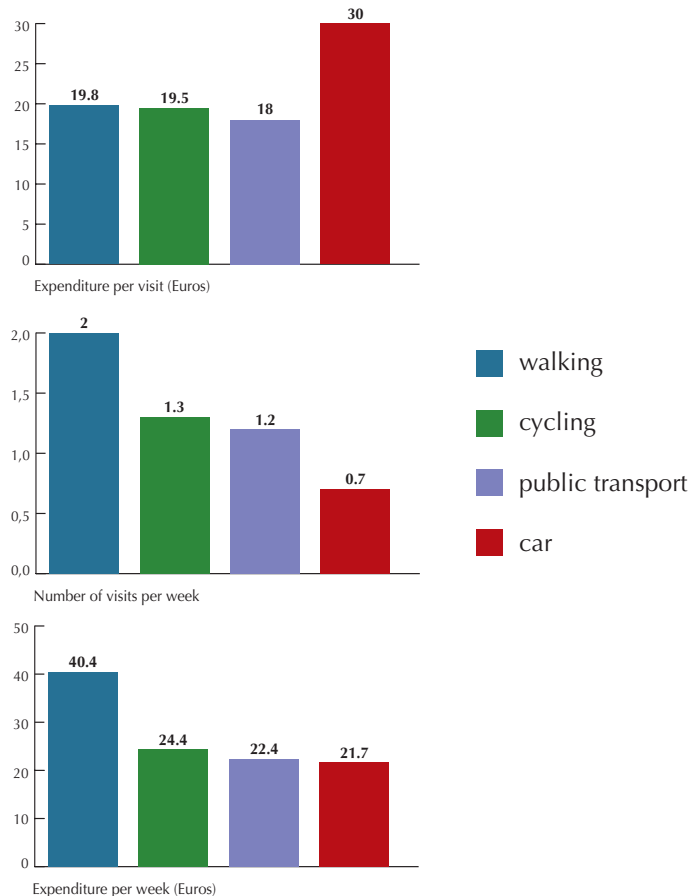
by bike also own a car; but they deliberately choose to move around on two wheels. Another survey by the retail association BEG showed that, in terms of percentage, cyclists more commonly shop for goods worth more than 100 Euros in total. They also, in many cases, buy higher quality products than customers coming on foot or by car. Even though cyclists do not spend as much money per shopping trip as car users, they generate more revenue over a certain period of time because they come back more often.

Bicycles are predominantly used for shopping in the surrounding area of the neighbourhood. A survey interviewing cycling customers in two shopping streets in the city of Bremen showed that almost all persons interviewed said that they lived less than 5 km from these shopping streets. Customers use their bikes with above-average frequency especially when shopping for everyday items (e.g. food or toiletries) because, traditionally, shopping trips for such items are relatively short, and the items can be transported comparatively easily. The results of a survey conducted by the trading association BAG in 150 cities showed that cyclists accounted for 23 % of the shopping traffic for daily essentials. In the segments of aperiodic demand (e.g. clothes, electronics), this share is 3-5 %. However, the results of the survey MiD 2008 also reveal that the shopping centres on the outskirts of town are securing an ever-broadening customer base also in the area of daily essentials. The significance of the 'greenfield' is now almost as high as that of the city and town centres. In three quarters of the cases, customers of shopping centres on the outskirts of town buy their daily essentials there. Against this backdrop, the promotion of cycling contributes to the strengthening of purchasing power in city centres, smaller communities and residential areas and helps local retailers compete with the 'greenfield'.

One special economic advantage from the retailers' point of view is the small amount of parking space required by cyclists. Bicycles require only a fraction of the parking space of a car. A consumer survey carried out in Bern calculated the ratio between customer profitability (value of purchased items) and costs for customer parking as follows: Cyclists generated EUR 7,500 per square metre and car drivers only EUR 6,625 per square metre.

An Austrian study found that the total amount purchased on half of all shopping trips weighs less than 5 kilograms, and 70 % of the shopping is transported home

by bike without any trouble. By taking simple measures, municipalities, local action groups and retailers can help ensure that this potential offered by bicycle traffic is exploited.



Statistical data for shopping with various means of transport. Customer survey in six French city regions. Source: Brichet 2003. Figure: Difu

Bicycle friendliness is a crucial criterion for achieving long-term customer loyalty. According to a customer survey carried out in Kiel, 36 % of the interviewees said that positive cycle-friendly signals would be a reason to shop more frequently at a particular business. On the other hand, 22 % of the interviewees said that poor cycling conditions would be a reason to shop less often at a particular business. An especially relevant factor in this context was the quality of the parking facilities.

A study conducted for Austria (Gumpinger 2010) investigated the impact that choice of transport has on shopping. If the percentage of cyclist shoppers were to in-

Further Reading

ACTIVE ACCESS: EU-project for an environmentally friendly local mobility in cities, Information and European best practice concerning cycling to shopping (www.active-access.eu)

SUSTRANS (2006): Shoppers and how they travel (www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/liveable%20neighbourhoods/Shoppers%20info%20sheet%20-%20LN02.pdf)

BUND Berlin e.V. (2008): Radverkehr belebt das Geschäft Empfehlungen für Handel und Verwaltung, Broschüre (www.edoc.difu.de/edoc.php?id=9V81G5TQ) [German]

crease by just 1 %, an additional revenue potential of 0.2 % would be generated for local retailers. This is attributable to the relocation of shopping trips from shopping centres on the outskirts of town. In the medium term, a 10 to 15 % reduction in the number of shopping trips made by car to the outskirts of town is realistic. As a result, an additional maximum revenue potential worth a total of EUR 1.3 million is estimated for the local retail sector if they succeed in encouraging customers to shop by bike near their homes.



Shopping by bike with kids © Jörg Thiemann-Linden

Cycling to shopping: differences between social groups and types of areas

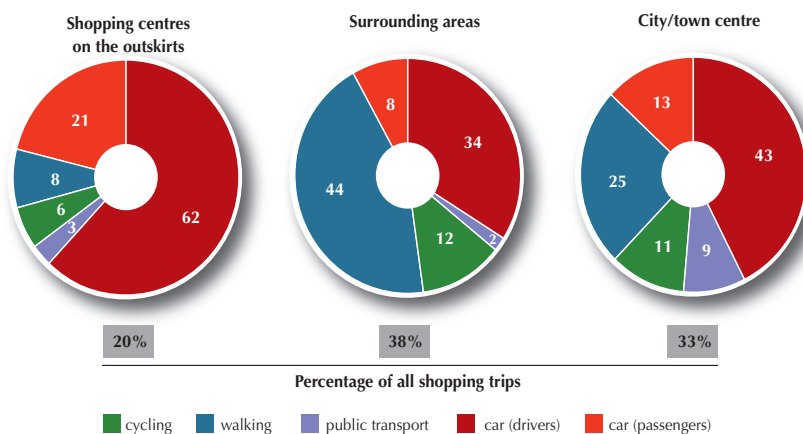
The frequency of people shopping by bike varies among different social groups. The nationwide mobility survey Mobility in Germany (MiD) revealed that there is a relatively high percentage of cyclists among young people aged 10 to 17, who do not yet have a driving licence. Bicycle use for persons above the age of 45, and particularly persons between 60 and 65 years of age, is also above-average. Moreover, there are concrete groups within society for whom bicycle use is particularly prominent: housewives, students and pensioners. In contrast, for the group of young adults between 18 and 45 years of age, shopping by bike still constitutes an untapped potential.

The decision regarding which means of transport is used also depends on the size of the respective city or town. In principle, one can say that the bigger the city,

the more people make use of the public short-distance transport instead of their car. A survey conducted by the trading association BAG concluded that the bicycle is, above all, more frequently used in medium-sized cities, regardless of whether the public short-distance transport is top-notch or less satisfactory. With respect to the average distance of shopping trips, no significant differences can be identified between larger cities with more than one million inhabitants and medium-sized cities. However, according to the results of the survey MiD 2008, a comparatively large percentage of shopping is done outside the borders of the town or city, which makes cycling difficult.

Vitalising neighbourhoods and city centres

City centres are increasingly becoming the focus of public life and retail activities again. In Germany, shopping centres are now increasingly shifting their focus from the outskirts of town back to central locations. Large-scale parking facilities entice customers to use their car, thus increasing traffic congestion. Moreover, there is the risk that neighbourhood and town centres could become overwhelmed by the competition coming from the large shopping centres on the 'greenfield' and the revitalised city centres.



Modal split of trips to different shopping destinations. Source: MID 2008. Figure: Difu

Short-distance mobility, cycling and walking play a significant role in the stabilisation and strengthening of the local retail sector. For the city of short-distance transport and its contribution to climate protection, the choice of

Gumpinger, Georg/CIMA GmbH (2010): Radfahren und Einkaufen. Potentiale des Fahrrads für den Einzelhandel in Österreich (wko.at/fahrzeuge/content_frame/news/Studie_Radfahren_und_Einkaufen.pdf) [German]

Pro Velo Schweiz (2009): Erschließung von Einkaufsgeschäften für den Fuss- und Veloverkehr (www.pro-velo.ch/fileadmin/redaktion/Dateien/Publikationen/Broschueren/Broschuere_Erschliessung_d.pdf) [German]

where to shop is crucial, also when it comes to the local revenues of the retail sector, because the choice of transport is directly linked to the place chosen for shopping.

When it comes to short distances, the bicycle outweighs all other means of transport in terms of time, costs and accessibility. Cyclists and pedestrians alike fill the streets with life and create an urban, and at the same time relaxed, atmosphere, with many random face-to-face contacts. Bicycles take up only a sixth of the parking space of a car. If even just a portion of the short car trips is successfully replaced by cycling, new space can be won for urban planning concepts that can improve the quality of time spent on the street.

Wants and needs of cycling customers

Comfortable parking facilities should be located near the shops and if possible also stable, well lit and, wherever architecture allows, sheltered. These facilities can be set up either decentralized, in front of the individual shops, or in central locations offering parking space for larger parts of the city centre, for example in the form of bicycle parking houses.

Services offered in shops and city centres meet the needs of cyclists by providing them with tyre pumps,



The newly built bicycle garage in the centre of Münster
© Westfälische Bauindustrie GmbH

puncture-repair kits and cycling maps of the city. Lockers or staffed left-luggage offices give cyclists the opportunity to drop off their purchased goods, thus enabling them to continue their shopping unburdened. Delivery services with which goods are delivered directly home from the shop enable customers to shop for larger items or large volumes of goods with-

out a car. For regular trips with larger volumes of goods (or with small children or pets), it is wise to use a cargo trike, which has become an integral part of the local bicycle culture particularly in Copenhagen.

Moreover, the objective and subjectively perceived road safety in the shopping streets and on the access routes is a decisive factor. A customer survey carried out in Bremen showed that 50 % of the interviewees complained about the high speed of cars in the two shopping streets selected for the survey. In addition, public buses in the city were listed as a risk factor.

As part of the project 'shopping by bike', which was commissioned by the German government and run by the environmental organization BUND, Friends of the Earth Germany from 2006 to 2008, customer surveys were carried out in Göttingen in order to better understand the needs of shopping cyclists. On top of the list was the wish for more cycle-parking facilities followed by the wish to open one-way streets, allowing cyclists to ride in the opposite direction to the rest of the traffic. The third wish was an improved interaction among road users. Another frequently expressed wish was that cyclists wanted an expansion of the cycle route network, more cycle-friendly routes and a temporary opening of the pedestrian zone for cyclists.

Conclusion

Cycling enhances the vitality of neighbourhoods and city centres, thus strengthening the local retail sector. More bicycles and a reduced use of cars help create space to improve the quality of public space and contribute to an attractive and pleasant shopping atmosphere. In doing so, retailers need not worry about a decline in demand. Cyclists are loyal customers with strong purchasing power. In order to attract cyclist to shops, the obstacles faced by shoppers on two wheels must be countered with a wide range of services, comfortable parking facilities and safe roads. This requires coordinated action between the municipalities and the local retail sector.



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More information on Cycling to Shopping can be found in
CyE S-5 Local Action to Encourage Cycling for Shopping
CyE I-5 Bicycle Parking in the City Centre

"Cycling Expertise" is available online:
www.nrvp.de/en/transferstelle

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