

Bicibús in Barcelona through a Justice Lens

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Hello,

Thanks for your interest! As part of the City Lab Barcelona, a research group at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, I conducted my Master Thesis about Active Travel to School in Barcelona and looked at the local Bicibús movement. Here I summarize the main ideas. I am happy to discuss and answer any questions (anna.sach@autonoma.cat).

I hope that this can spark reflections and processes within and beyond the Bike Bus movement.

Yours,

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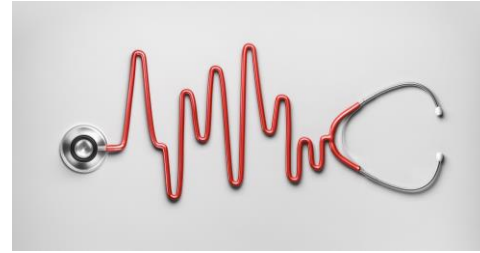
Why is Active Mobility to School important?



Environment

less noise and air pollution

air pollution has negative effects on brain development of primary school children in Barcelona (Sunyer et al., 2015)



Health

provides physical activity

lack of physical activity is the highest excess mortality in Barcelona (Mueller et al., 2017)



Social & education

neighborhood connections

long-lasting impact on travel behaviour (Hidalgo et al., 2016)

Context of Barcelona

Unequal cycling habits

- Most deprived areas have less access to bike network and Bicing (Anaya-Boig et al., 2022)
- People with higher education cycle more (Codina et al., 2022)
- Almost two of three cyclists are men. Cycling and care tasks difficult to combine (Col·lectiu Punt 6, 2021)

Schools

- Approximately 3 of 4 children walk or cycle to school (Schiaffino & Medina, 2023).
- Social composition of schools separates children from different social classes and migration biographies (Gomà Garcia & Muñoz Aranda, 2018)
- Unequal educational offer and unequal mobility capital (Scandurra et al., 2022)



What is a Bicibús?

Travel to School

A group goes to school like a bus picking up (and dropping) students.

Safety

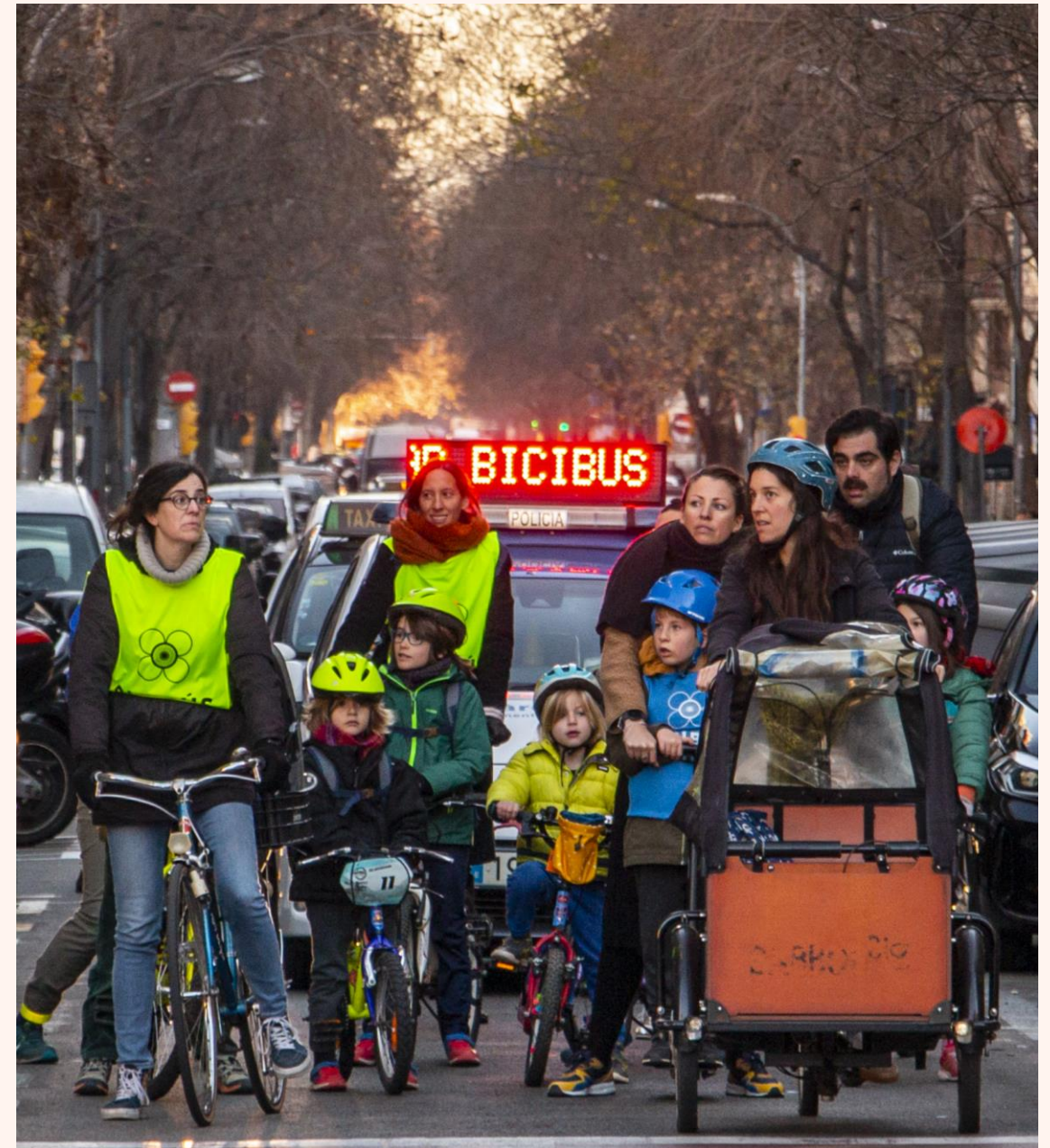
Protecting each other in the group from the car traffic. Caregivers and/or volunteers accompany children.

Protest

Doing so, groups occupy streets demanding safer, more child-friendly and healthier cities.

Benefits

Participants enjoy fun, exercise, and social moments, while they develop positive attitudes towards cycling and themselves.



Why do we look at the Bicibús through a justice lens?

Mobility Justice

Power and injustice shape (im)mobility patterns along gendered, class and racialized lines.

Children mobility

Studies found differences in mode of transport between children of different gender, socioeconomic status and migration biographies

Social inequalities

Cycling movements can generate and reinforce inequalities. Some groups of population are overlooked and do not participate.

Justice?

Who has access? Who benefits? Who can take part?
Who is recognized? Who is heard?



Methods

What did we do?



Literature Review

- academic articles
 - reports
- administrative data



Online Survey with Organisers

- global survey
- May 2022 – April 2023

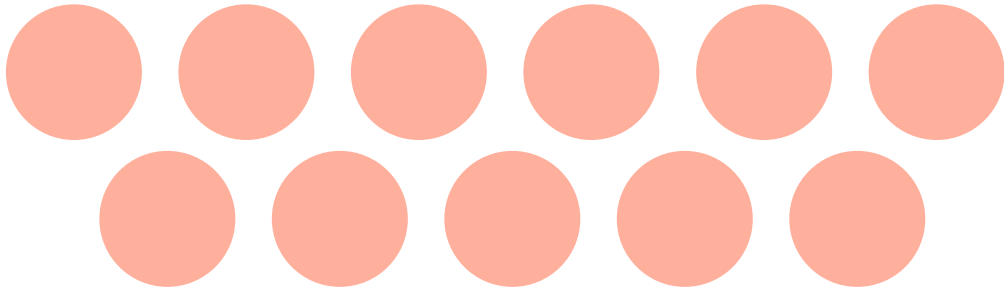


Interviews with Parents

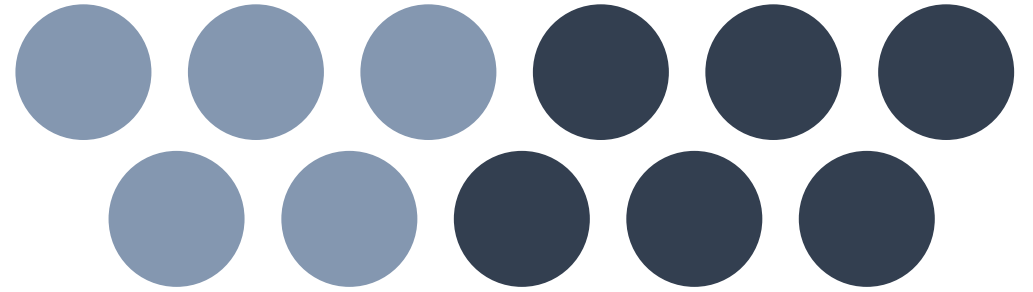
- 22 parents: 11 participants and 11 non-participants
 - from 14 schools
 - all min. 1 child in primary school
 - on average 1 h
 - in Spanish, Catalan, English, or German
 - place and time agreed with interviewees
- 15€ compensation gift card for sustainable cooperative
 - March – April 2023

Characteristics of Interviewees

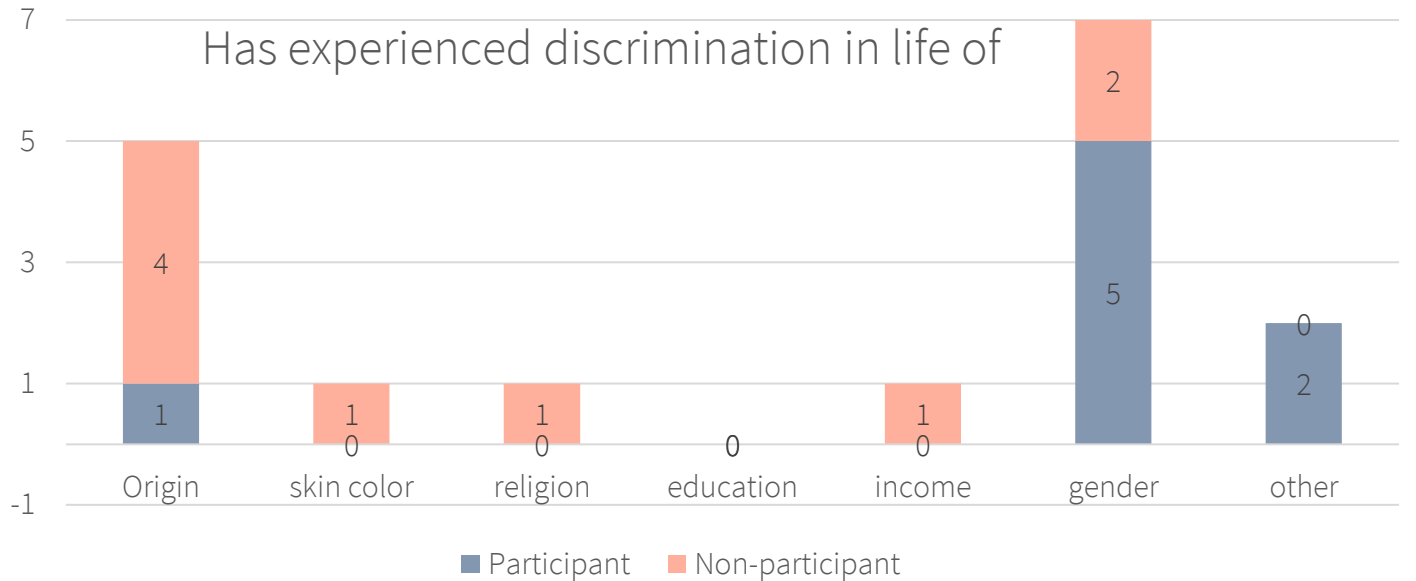
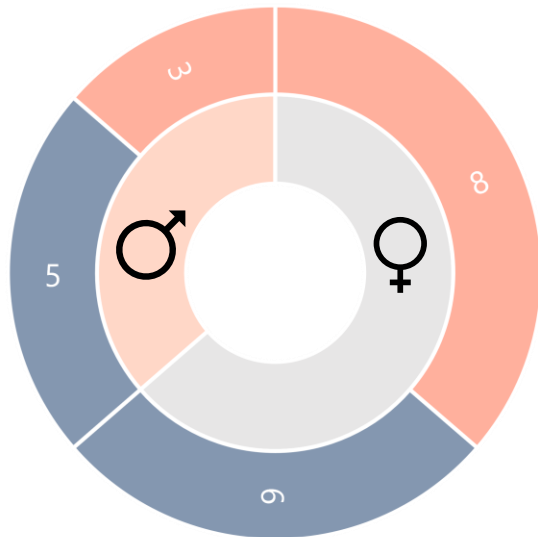
11 Non-Participants



11 Participants of the Bicibús
(of which 6 organisers)

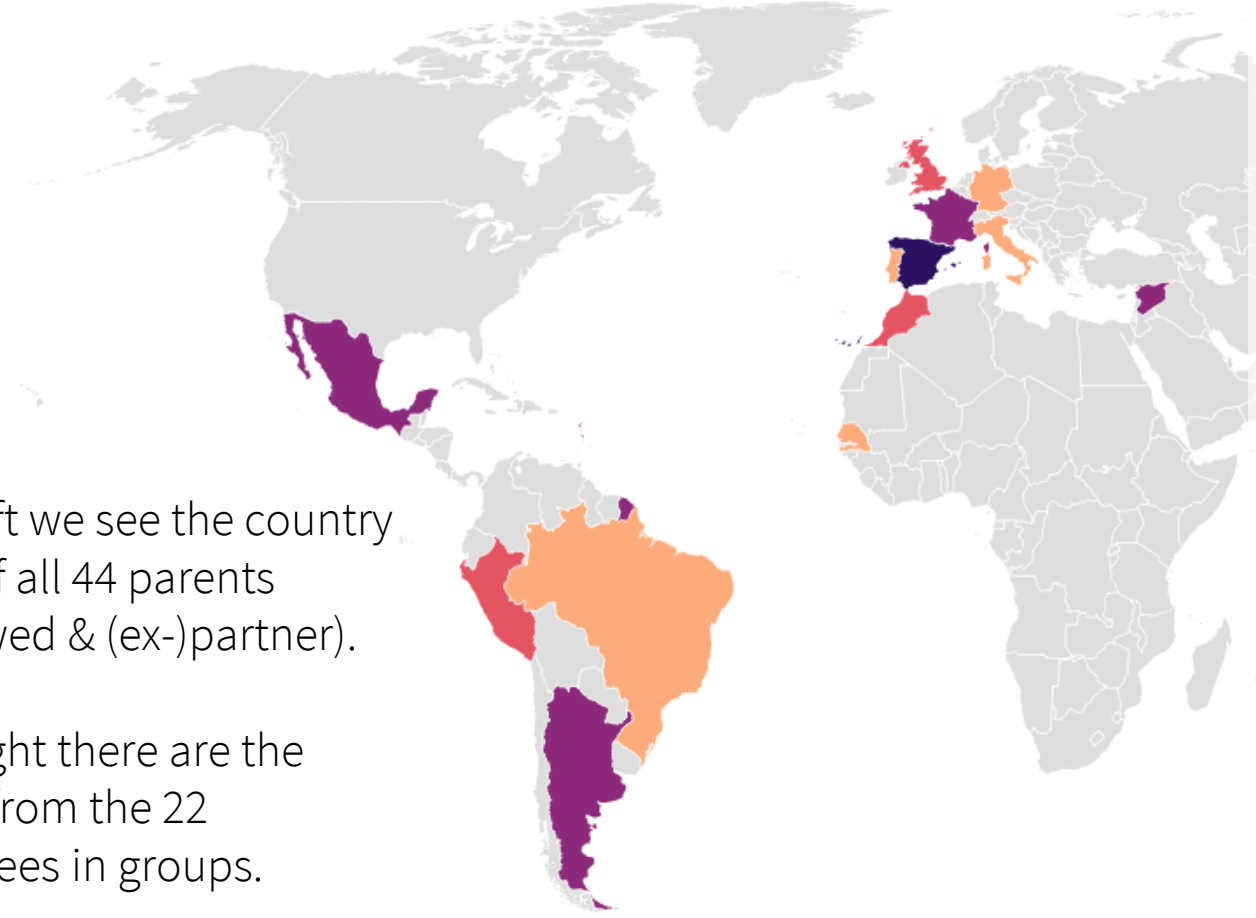


Gender interviewed parent



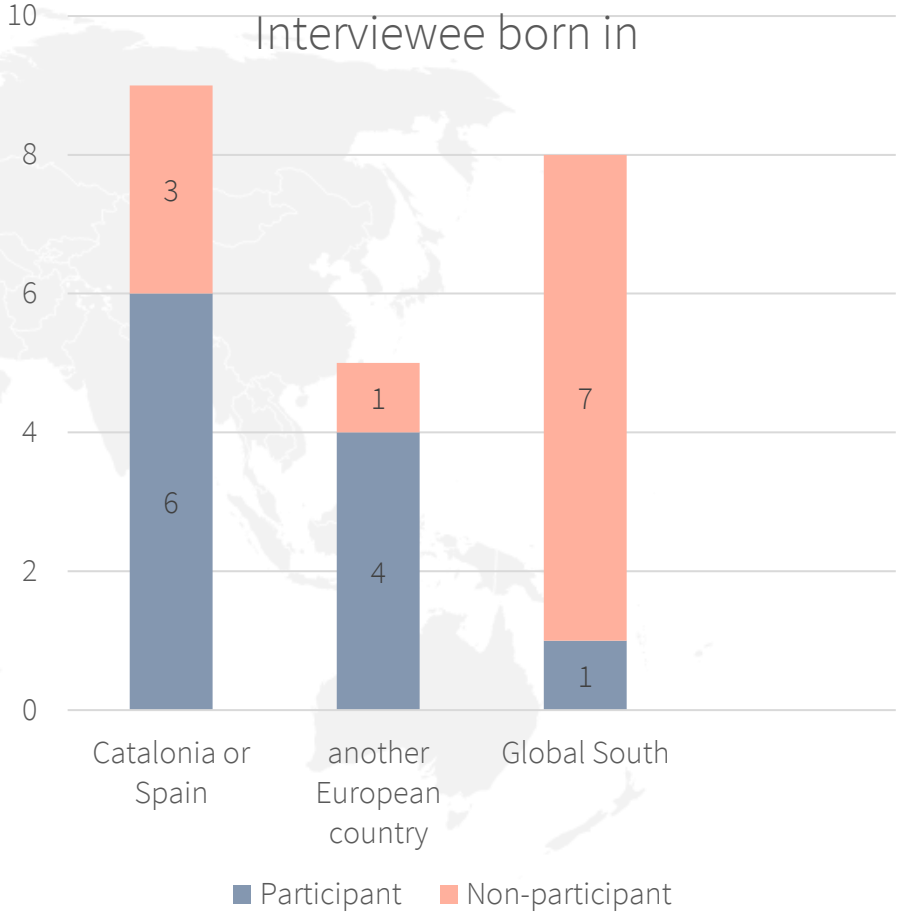
Country of birth of the parents

■ 1
 ■ 2
 ■ 3
 ■ 22

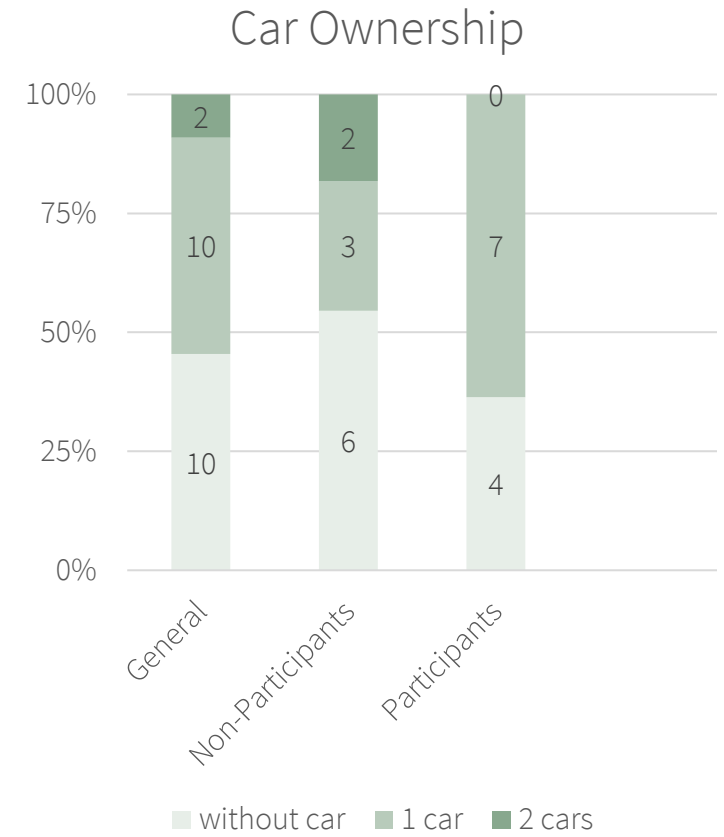
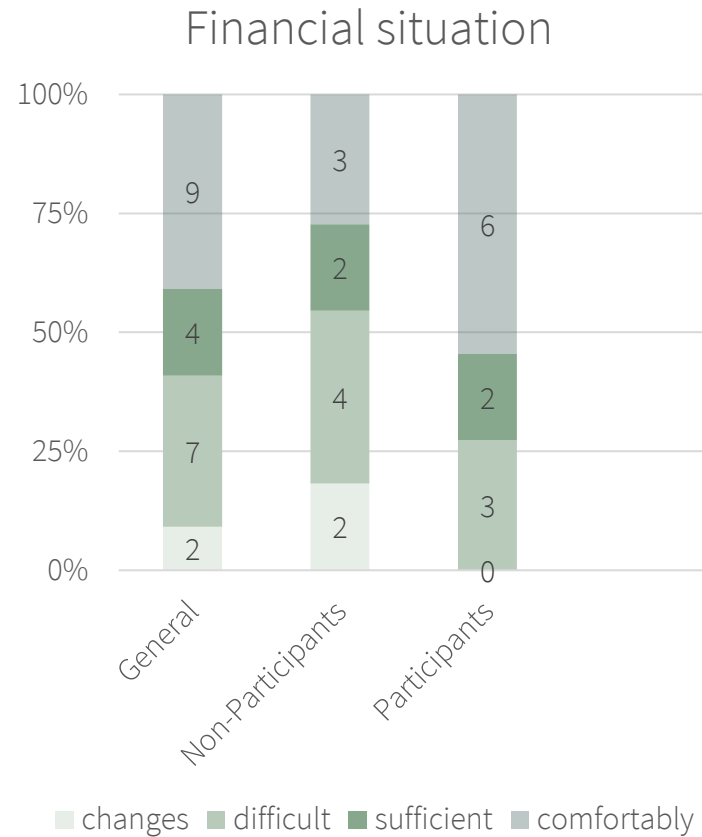
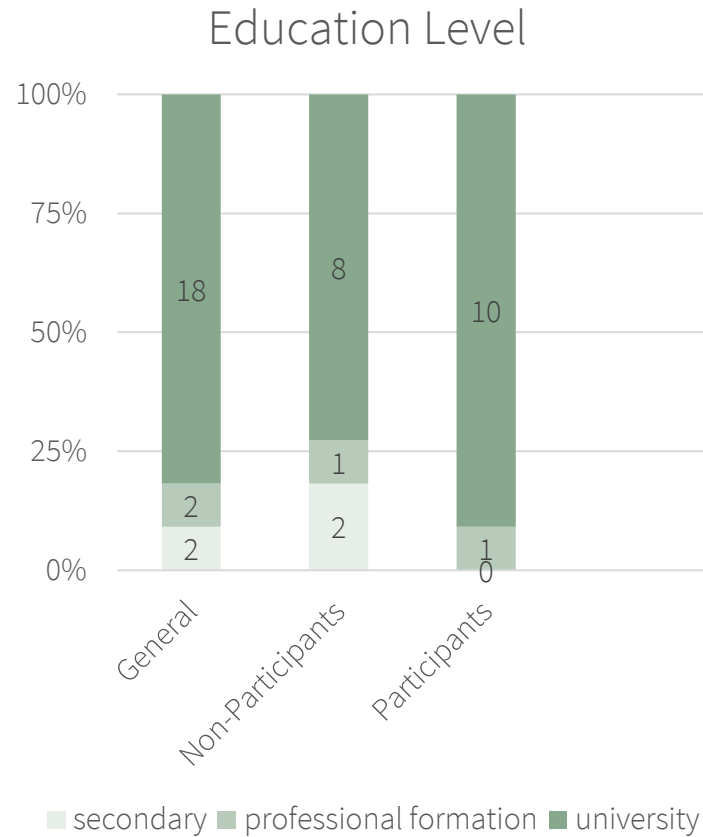


On the left we see the country of birth of all 44 parents (interviewed & (ex-)partner).

On the right there are the answers from the 22 interviewees in groups.



Education, work and car



Average working hours 33.65 h

18/22 formal or self-employed

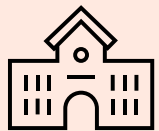
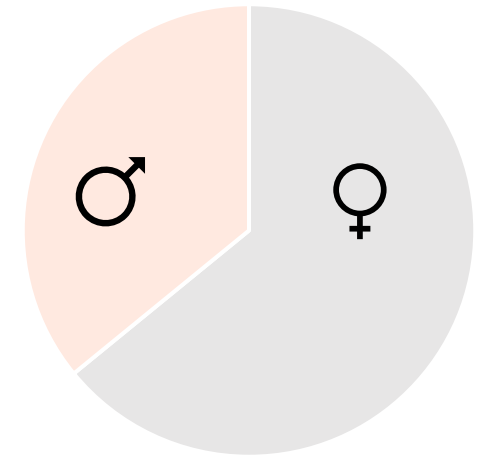
16/22 parents living together

Children & Schools



In total 39 children:
average 1.8 children per family,
average age: 6.2 years

Gender Child



3 families (non-participants) were enrolled at private schools.



5 families could not enroll their child/ren
in any of their preferred schools
(4 of them non-participants, 1 participant).



Findings

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1. Where are Bicibús Routes?

Most routes in wealthier districts

Eixample and Sarrià-Sant Gervasi have most Bicibús routes, being two of the richest districts (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022)

No routes in Sants-Montjuïc and Nou-Barris

Those are districts with high level of poverty, least access to bikes and high percentage of parents who have difficulties to meet their childrens needs (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022).

Also no route in Gràcia

Because of walk- and cycle-friendly environment or short ways to school?

Maximum complexity schools left out

Schools with students who are facing more difficulties are not connected to any Bicibús route.



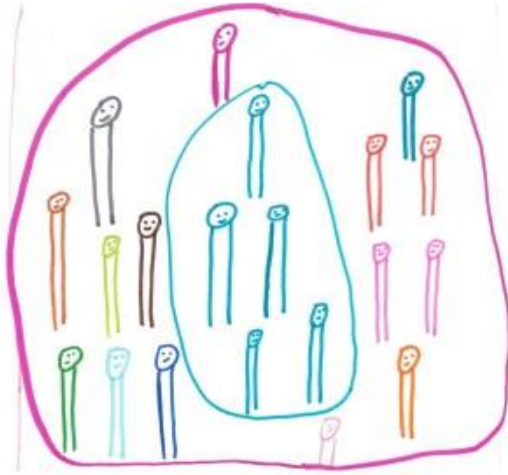
Bicibús routes in Barcelona

Overview of 18 Bicibús routes by districts in the city of Barcelona 2021-2023

| District | Name | Since | Distance (km) | Time (min) | Frequency | No. of schools | No. of participants | Gender adult | Gender child |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Ciutat Vella | Ciutat Vella | 2022 | 2.7 | 26 | Weekly | 2 (potentially 3) | 40 | E | M |
| Eixample | Eixample – Sagrada Família | 2022 | 1.75 | 15 | Weekly | 3-4 | 40 | E | E |
| | Eixample – Diagonal | 2022 | 1.1 | n.d. | Weekly | 4 | 30-35 | M | F |
| | Eixample – Letamendi | 2022 | 1.9 | 25 | Weekly | 7 | 50 | E | M |
| | Eixample – Sant Antoni | 2021 (2022) | 2 | 20 (17.5) | Daily since 2022 | 4 (mainly 2) | 150 (35-40) | F | M |
| | Eixample – Consell de Cent | 2021 | 1.75 | 22.5 | Weekly | 4 | 30 | E | E |
| | Fort Pienc ^a | 2022 | 1.3 – 2 | 10 – 19 | Weekly | 3 | 17 | M | E |
| Sants-Montjuïc | // | | | | | | | | |
| Les Corts | Les Corts | 2021 | 2.8 | 25 | Weekly | 4 | 41 | E | E |
| | Pedralbes | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. | Occasional | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| Sarrià-Sant Gervasi | Sarrià – Bonanova | 2021 | 3.44 | 30 | Twice a week | > 13 | 15 | E | E |
| Sant Martí | Sarrià – Tres Torres | 2022 | 3.6 | 35 | Twice a week | > 13 | 5 | E | M |
| | Sarrià – Via Augusta | 2021 | 4.8 | 50 | Twice a week | 11 | 100 | M | M |
| | Vallvidrera | 2022 | 2.4 | 20 | Occasional | mainly 2 | 8 | F | E |
| Gràcia | // | | | | | | | | |
| Horta-Guinardó | Guinardó | 2023 | 1.2 | n.d. | Weekly | 3-4 | 9 | E | M |
| Nou Barris | // | | | | | | | | |
| Sant Andreu | Sant Andreu – La Sagrera | 2022 | 1.98 | 20 | Weekly | 2-3 | 55 | E | M |
| | Els Indians – La Sagrera | 2023 | 1.2 | 24 | Weekly | 3 | 30 | M | M |
| Sant Martí | El Clot | 2021 | 1 | 10 | Weekly | 1 (potentially 3) | 7 | E | F |
| | Auditori | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. | Occasional | 1 | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| Average | | | 2.2 | 25.45 | | 5 | 34 | M (-0.13) ^b | M (-0.38) ^b |

Note. Routes represented in the sample are marked in bold. ^a Eixample from name but starts in Sant Martí and one school is in Ciutat Vella. F = more female participants, M = more male participants, E = equal. ^b Average calculated with E = 0, F = 1, M = -1.

2. Who is participating?

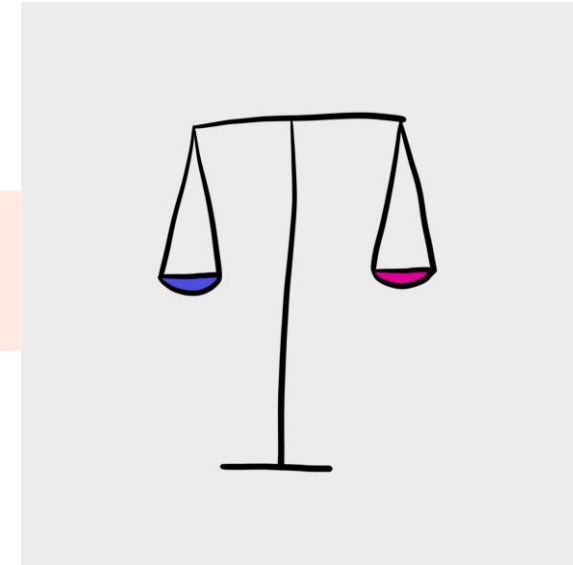


Initiatives fall short in integrating
low-income and racialized families

The participants are said to be predominantly:

“white, middle-class Europeans” [organizer]

“professionals with higher level of studies” [organizer]



Gender balance in children and adults

Different gendered meanings cross:
*“it is indeed care work because you take
your child to school, but you go by bike oc-
cupying the street. So, they intersect.”*

[organizer]

3. Why do we see this patterns? School Choice

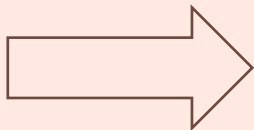
Creation of Bicibús

- Most routes were initiated by parents at public schools with progressive educational projects.
- Parents have oft been already active in parental associations or other groups.

Reflect social inequalities

- Uneven school offer in neighborhoods, housing opportunities, lack of modes of transport, parental time constraints, and unequal knowledge about schools make school selection privileged choice.

“crazy, a lot of tension, and in the end, it also results in the generation of differences” [non-participant]



important to claim improvements *“for all, not only for the children of the parents who are represented there [in the talks with the Mayor]”*
[non-participant]

Optimal conditions for Bicibús creation



Self-selection

“the target group of parents is also exactly the target group that jumps on something like the Bicibús” [participant]

likeminded families

(open for new and uncertain structures)



Social ties

strong because

- a) new schools initially small
- b) some parents chose school for more possibilities to build up school community
- c) often it was their first child to be enrolled, for this they might engaged stronger in the school community
- d) already some years at school before Covid pandemic



Distances

pedagogical project more important than longer distance

for families who could use bikes/scooter, distances do not matter so much

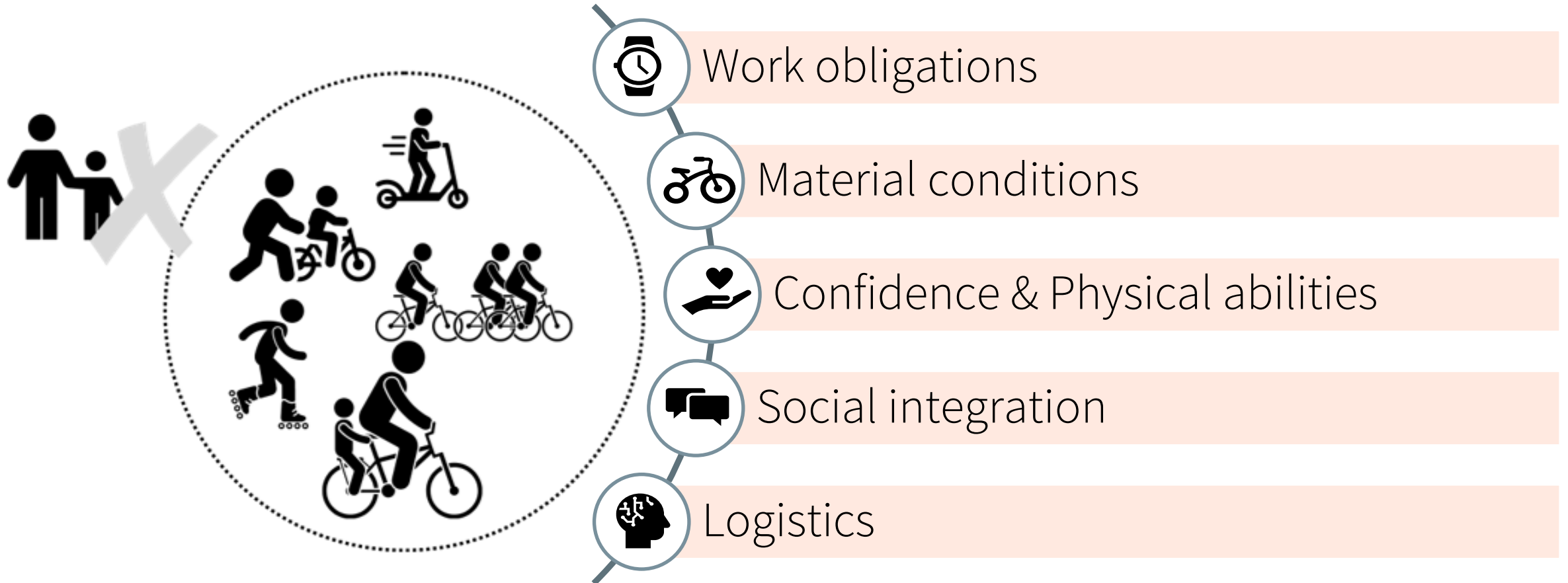
“I do argue that the Bicibús is a bit elitist. That's exactly that: [counts with the fingers]:

- 1. You first need a bicycle.*
- 2. You need the ability to arrange in terms of working hours to be able to participate.*
- 3. And this is also the case with people who have a higher level of education and more money available, so that they can arrange to participate and take the time.*
- 4. And you have to keep the bike in some way maintained.*
- 5. Store it. It's definitely a luxury issue because you need the space for it.”*

[participant]

4. What barriers hinder families from participation?

Even if they have a Bicibús route on their way to school





Work Obligation

Time availability

- makes participation impossible
- some parents have to drop children earlier at school

“I pay the service of childcare at school, and between this and the reduced working hours and so on I can manage. I can’t participate because of that either.”
[non-participant]

Flexibility

- where and when to work
- also classed division

“there are more people in high-skilled jobs that allow you to work remotely, which allows you to go home”
[organizer]

Type of activity

- dress code or sweating hinder participation
- physical activity

“I work [...] walking all fucking day. I mean, let’s say that doing sport is what I feel like doing the least, giving more to my legs.”
[non-participant]



Material conditions

- many said **buying bike** (especially second hand) feasible
 - but harder for more strained budgets
 - additional costs for helmets, maintenance, etc..
- **gifted bike or gift cards** made interviewees in difficult financial situations start to cycle themselves or their children
- **parking** at home limited (connected to housing crisis)
 - fear of bike theft hinders parking
- “cheaper to have **skates or a scooter** than a bike or it fits you more at home” [participant]
- **environment** needs to be safe
 - to access starting point
 - for way back
 - in case the Bicibús is missed





Confidence & Physical Abilities

Fear

group creates protection

“It creates a mobile safe environment that accompanies you from one point to the schools.”
[non-participant who used to participate]

Cycling skills

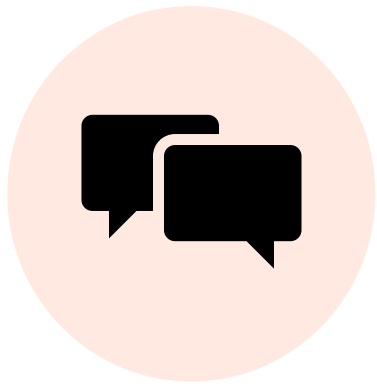
parent who is learning to cycle was discouraged when she asked in a Bicibús group:

“I don’t know how to ride a bike, can I come?” – ‘No, no, that is for those who know.’”
[non-participant]

Physical abilities

can restrain participation, for example visual impairment

“for me the bike feels a bit more dangerous than for the rest of people”
[non-participant]



Social Intergration

Integration facilitates participation

- knowledge about the existence is needed. Communication on social media and mouth-to-mouth did not reach all families.
- organizers/participants draw in new participants: “effect of contagion” [participant]
- social ties help to overcome barriers:

“There are possibly children who, due to family contexts or poverty, are unable to come, so it would be ideal if the Bicibús could also take them in and children could join without the person in charge.” [organizer]

Lack of integration makes participation difficult

“in the end, mutual support networks can also help. [But] it also depends on the possibility of socialization that you have within the families. Because some people may not participate as much because of language or so on.” [non-participant]

“Possibly people who have migrated or from other schools do not have such a bond.” [organizer]



Logistics

Time

- many families leave house earlier for Bicibús (15-30 min, up to an hour)
- group gives a fixed deadline
- participation is only no additional (time) effort when the route is very convenient, and the family routinized

*“Because if it’s 8:35 a.m. and nobody has put on their shoes yet, there is a moment when reality is stronger than ideas.”
[participant]*

Complexity

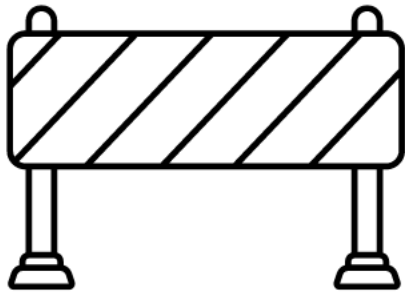
- preparing children, bikes, and backpacks, taking them down on the street, locking bikes and the way back with child/ren and bike/s

“When there is a Bicibús, I also try like, well, prepare things before, so I can leave on time and enjoy it.” [participant]

might be more difficult for people who have it harder to make ends meet:

*“[people of] lower socioeconomic levels have less time, maybe less money to buy a bike and to maintain it, but also less time to and less margin – and very often also less emotional margin – to add a new constraint to their daily logistics.”
[organizer]*

5. What role do emotions play?



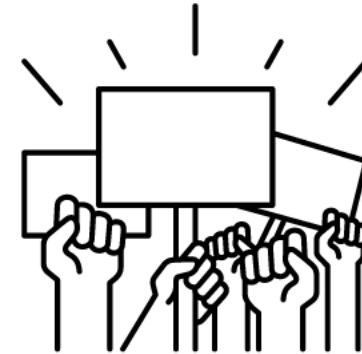
Barriers

Fear and lack of belonging can hold back participation.



Fun & Activism

*"I think for the majority of us who are there now, it is protest and it's activism. But with the format we've done, I think we've also attracted families who maybe weren't so activist, but they love it."
[organizer]*



Entitlement

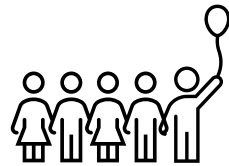
Participants feel entitled to protest.
Also (migrant) non-participants are active in movements.
They seem to have other priorities for political work than the bike bus.

6. Contribution towards more just sustainable cities



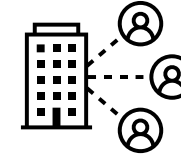
Space

“Space must be for everyone, not just for cars.”
[participant]



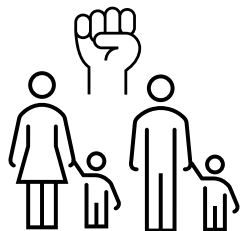
Age

„You give them protagonism in the city.“
[organizer]



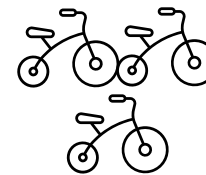
All residents

“You put your body to make the city more breathable, livable, and comfortable.” [organizer]



Politicizing Care

“It is politicizing. Everyday care. Empowering.”
[organizer]



Collective Mobility

“The idea was really to collectivize and make visible this way of moving around the city and to put it in the center of the city.” [organizer]

What could be done?

Recommendations for Bicibús organizers to promote mobility justice



Raise awareness for injustices & build alliances with anti-racist and anti-eviction movements



Set up support systems like second-hand material exchange, free maintenance opportunities, coordination to allow children to participate without their caregivers



Facilitate creation of mutual support groups for underrepresented groups



Create routes benefitting marginalized students - with institutional support if needed



Collaborate with schools to reach all families (communication & integration in school activities)



Conclusions

- Grassroots cycling movements are not exempt from social injustices.
- Experiencing a Bicibús is a glimpse of what another city - more sustainable, safer, healthier, and enjoyable - could look like.
- Activists need to pave the way, so that all families have the opportunity to participate in these cycling protests.

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