

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
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Cycling and peacebuilding

Cycling and Society symposium, Lund University
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Outline

1. Are bicycles ‘peaceful’?
2. Four overlapping cycling/peace themes:
    1. Health
    2. Spatial transformation
    3. Environment
    4. Development
3. Refelections from Belfast on peace and pedalling
4. Conclusion: A research agenda on cycling and peace

UN World Bicycle Day Declaration 2018

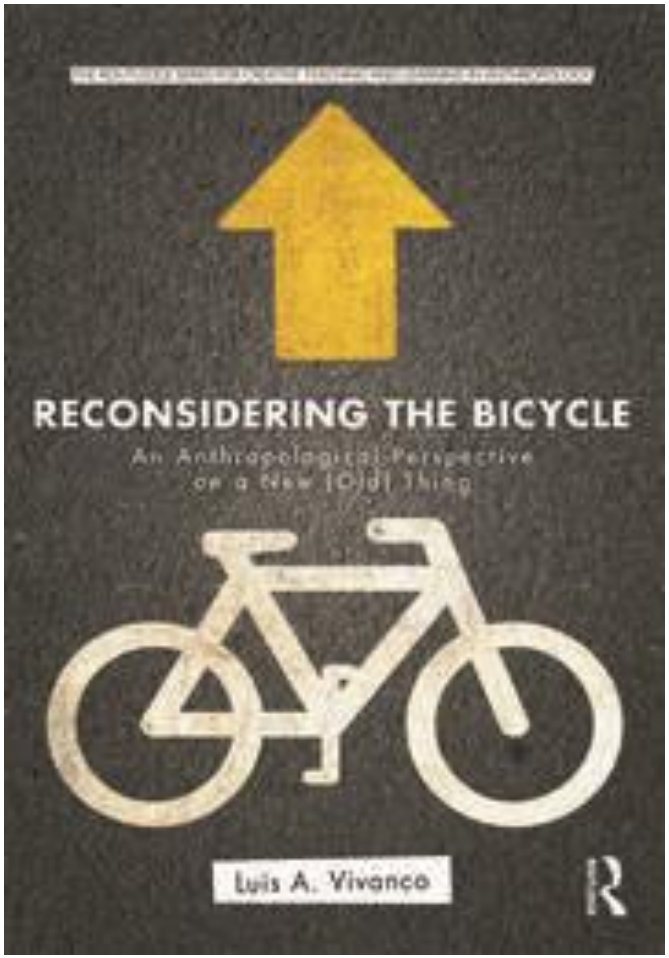
Acknowledging the uniqueness, longevity and versatility of the bicycle, which has been in use for two centuries, and that it is a simple, affordable, reliable, clean and environmentally fit sustainable means of transportation, **fostering environmental stewardship and health…**

Emphasizing that the bicycle is a symbol of sustainable transportation and conveys a positive message to foster sustainable consumption and production, and **has a positive impact on climate…**

5. *Encourages* stakeholders to emphasize and advance the use of the bicycle as a means of **fostering sustainable development, strengthening education, including physical education, for children and young people, promoting health, preventing disease, promoting tolerance, mutual understanding and respect and facilitating social inclusion and a culture of peace** (UN 2018).

Are bicycles ‘peaceful’?

Bicycles are ‘heterogenous, multidimensional, and contextual objects, enmeshed in specific technological conditions, practices of life, social relations, cultural meanings, and political-economic dynamics’ (Vivanco 2015: xxi).



Cycling, peace, and health

- Health benefits of exercise and cycling are clear
- Physical and mental health are part of ‘positive peace’
- Conflict is bad for public health in numerous ways, with intergenerational impacts
- Thus conflict-affected societies may have most to gain from health impact of cycling

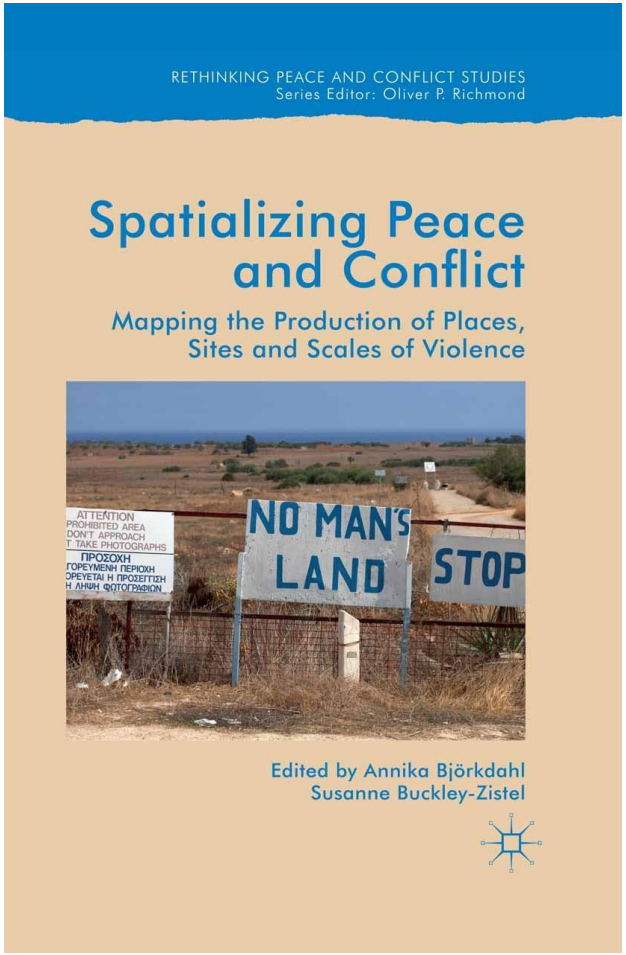


Cycling, peace, and spatial transformation

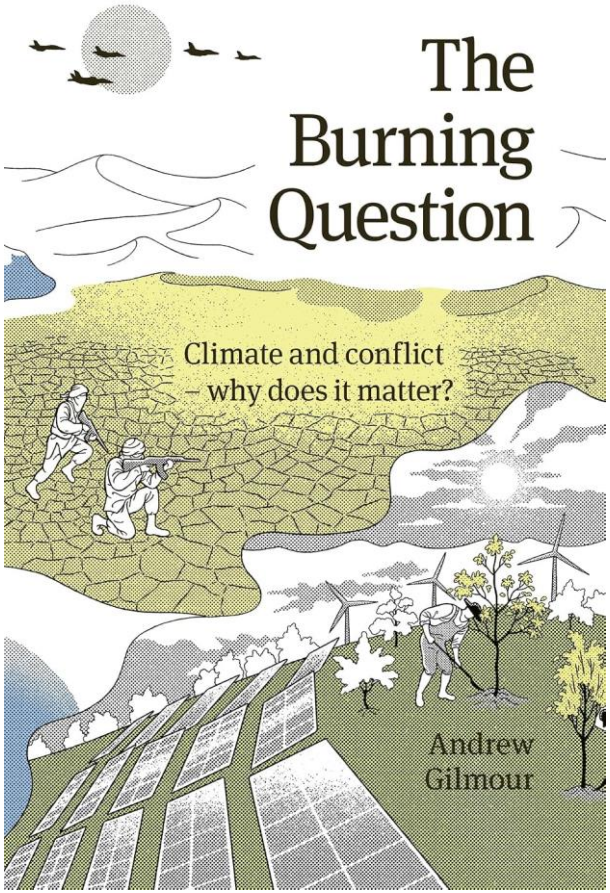
‘The organisation of space is significant for the structure and function of peace as well as war’ (Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016: 3).

Cycling might:

- transform the territorialisation of identity
- promote cross-group contact
- create everyday peace



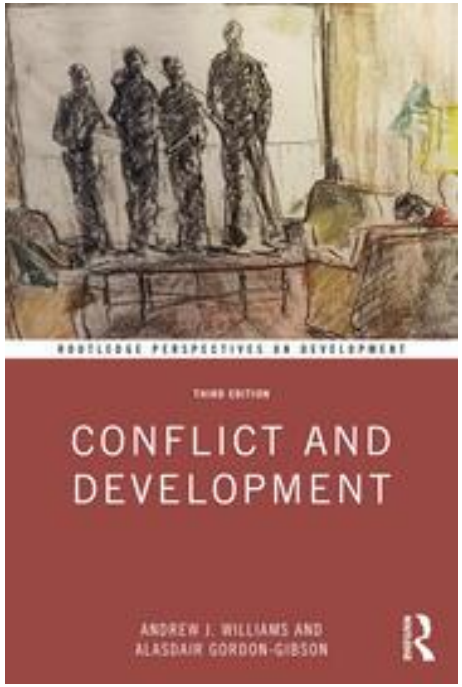
Cycling, peace, and the environment



- A peaceful future is one that is environmentally sustainable.
- Climate change is a ‘risk multiplier’ in conflicts (Gilmour 2024: 33).
- War, inequality, capitalism, and environmental destruction are interlinked
- Thus the environmental benefits of cycling should be valued in peace studies.

Cycling, peace, and development

- Inequality has always been a central topic peace studies.
- Countless ‘Bicycle for Development’ initiatives aim to lessen poverty, promote entrepreneurship, allow access to education and healthcare, and transform gender roles.
- Research on BFD is both positive and critical.





Refelections from Belfast on peace and pedalling…











‘The Troubles’
1968-1998





‘Good Friday Agreement’ 1998









(unstable) power-sharing government





Belfast today: a divided, car-centric city…



…with ongoing problems…





…some good cycleways…





… and some recent progress…



…where a bicycle is useful for research.



August 2026 ‘Fleadh’ music festival: people (finally) realising that pedestrianisation is part of peacebuilding?

Conclusion: a research agenda on cycling and peace

- *Cycling and public health in conflict*
- *Cycling and spatial division*
- *Cycling and social division*
- *Cycling and development*
- *Cycling and peace activism and education*
- *Cycling as a research methodology*

References

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