Between Joy and Fear for One's Life: Emotional Geographies of Women Cyclists in Prague

MGR. LUCIE ŠROGLOVÁ

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CHARLES UNIVERSITY, PRAGUE







Content of the presentation

- topic of the thesis and theoretical framework
- the Prague context
- methods and participants
- contradiction between planned materiality and lived experience - *the advanced stop line*

Aim of the thesis:

To explore women’s emotional experiences of cycling in a heavily motorized city that is still undergoing post-socialist transformations

Why women? Why emotions?

- Research shows a significant gender gap in urban cycling
- Greater anxiety among women (limited access to cycling throughout their lives, experiences of harassment) (Ravensbergen et al 2019)

Theoretical framework

Emotional geographies

(Davidson et al. 2016)

New mobilities paradigm

(Sheller and Urry 2006)

Encounters

(Simonsen 2008)

The Prague context

- Strong motorist culture
- Heavy motor traffic and a sense of danger – the biggest barrier (Median 2021)
- Urban cycling and emotions: an unexplored topic in Prague

1-2% of the population cycle every day (Median 2021)

8. most motorised NUTS 2 region in the EU (Eurostat 2025)

2 cyclists died while I was working on this thesis



Methods and participants

- 9 women cyclists
- 23 - 74 years of age (various life stages)

1. introductory interview
2. bike-along interviews filmed with GoPro camera
3. video elicitation
4. transcription and coding using the grounded theory





Findings

- situations connected to various emotions
- one of them: contradiction between planned materiality and lived experience
- example: ***the advanced stop line***



“Just last November […] I was practically paranoid that every car was trying to kill me. And it all started when I overtook some idiot driver to get in front of him to the spot [the advanced stop line]. […] He was totally freaked out when I looked at him, and he stopped in the middle of the intersection and just stared at me the whole time while I was cycling away. And I just thought he was trying to memorize what I looked like so he could drive around the block and run me over.” (Ela 27)

*“I used to have this unpleasant feeling when I was cycling to the front – you know, with all those drivers being so nervous – about the fact that I actually overtake them and pull into the front. […] But sometimes I think to myself, if there’s ever a bloke like that Michael Douglas from *Falling Down* – the one who was so angry he pulled out that baseball bat and really started smashing things – well, I hope no one ever does that to me… but it hasn’t happened to me yet.” (Jana 63)*

Conclusions

- The micro space of the advanced stop line illustrates the hazards of bad planning and how they put vulnerable road users in danger
- Partial infrastructural solutions can do more harm than good
- Qualitative research on the rich emotional and embodied experiences of (women) cyclists can apparently be very helpful in revealing these dysfunctional solutions and in making governors and planners understand the urgency of the need for better cycling paths.

Thank you for your attention!

l.sroglova@seznam.cz



Sources used in the presentation:

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