



Beyond bike lanes:

harnessing culture to
tackle urban mobility
challenges and more



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CYCLE UP! policy brief

The CYCLE UP! policy brief shows how culture can help cities tackle mobility challenges — and more. Based on CYCLE UP! project experience, it connects the policy context, tested culture-based approaches, city lessons and practical recommendations into one simple message: **infrastructure enables cycling, but culture is what helps make urban change:**

Visible

making urban challenges easier to see & discuss.

Inclusive

bringing in diverse voices & experiences.

Actionable

moving from ideas to change.

The brief brings this message together through five practical entry points for cities and decision-makers:

1 Policy context

WHY IT MATTERS

- Infrastructure makes cycling possible, but culture helps make it normal.
- Mobility choices are shaped by habits, perceptions, trust and public space.
- Cities need to understand what makes change feel safe, accepted and relevant.

2 The CYCLE UP! approach

WHAT THE PROJECT TESTED

- Artists, residents, mobility actors and cities worked together in local experiments.
- Artistic methods made technical or polarised issues easier to see, feel and discuss.
- Residents shared experiences, concerns and ideas rather than simply receiving a cycling message.

3 Local city examples

WHAT CITIES LEARNED IN PRACTICE

- Tartu — cycling stories revealed everyday mobility needs.
- Prague — interactive art made difficult cycling routes easier to understand.
- Katowice — a sound performance revealed how mobility shapes public space.
- Bratislava — a public festival connected cycling with creativity and community.

4 Policy recommendations

WHAT OTHER CITIES SHOULD DO

- Understand how people actually experience mobility.
- Involve different communities early.
- Make mobility challenges easier to see, feel and discuss.
- Build on existing methods and work with the artists.
- Make culture part of municipal planning and decision-making.

5 CYCLE UP! toolkit

HOW TO START

- Listen — understand a local challenge and the people it affects.
- Co-create — explore the toolkit and work with artists.
- Intervene — test an approach and involve the community.
- Reflect — capture feedback and lessons learned.
- Translate — use what you learn in planning and decisions.

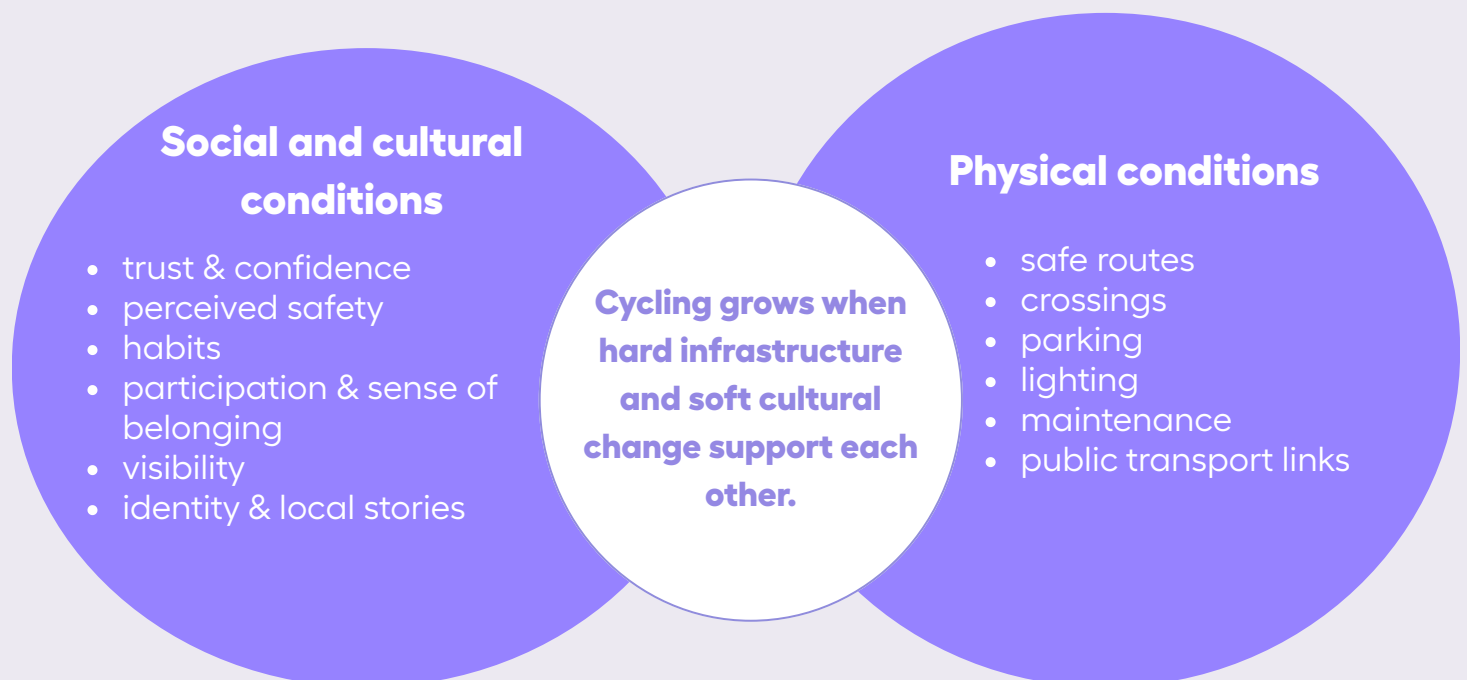


WHY CITIES NEED CULTURE-BASED MOBILITY APPROACHES

Cities across Europe are looking for **better ways to make urban change visible, inclusive and actionable**. Sustainable mobility is one of the most urgent fields where this is needed, and cycling plays an important role: it can reduce congestion, improve public health, lower emissions and make streets more liveable. But increasing cycling is not only a matter of building more bike lanes. Infrastructure is essential, but it does not automatically change how people move, how they feel in public space, or whether they see cycling as a realistic option in their everyday lives.

For many people, the decision to cycle is shaped by **practical conditions**: safe routes, good crossings, secure parking, lighting, maintenance and connections to public transport. Yet it is also shaped by **less visible factors**: habits, confidence, identity, social norms, family routines, perceived safety, local stories and the image of cycling in public debate. If cycling is seen as dangerous, inconvenient, political, uncool, or only for sport and leisure, new infrastructure may remain underused.

This is why cities need to look beyond infrastructure alone. **Mobility behaviour is part of everyday culture**. People choose how to move based not only on what is technically available, but also on what feels normal, safe, accepted and desirable. A street is not only a transport corridor; it is also a social space where different users negotiate visibility, comfort, priority and belonging. This makes cycling a useful starting point for a wider question: how can cities involve people in changes that affect everyday urban life?



WHAT CYCLE UP! TESTED

CYCLE UP! explored **how art, culture and participation can support cycling** alongside infrastructure and information campaigns. Rather than simply promoting cycling, the project invited people to explore how they experience streets, what shapes their mobility choices and what could make cycling feel more welcome.

The project brought together **artists, residents, cycling organisations, municipalities and decision-makers**. Residents were not just audiences for a cycling message: they shared their experiences, raised concerns and imagined alternatives.

CULTURE-BASED MOBILITY CHANGE HAPPENS BETWEEN PEOPLE, NOT ONLY INSIDE PLANS

CYCLING ACTORS

ARTISTS

make issues visible and relatable

bring mobility expertise and advocacy experience

DECISION-MAKERS

support uptake and longer-term change

RESIDENTS

share lived experience and local knowledge

CITIES AND

MUNICIPALITIES

connect ideas with planning and policy



@Who was involved?

Across cities, this took different forms, including artist residencies, creative workshops, public events, storytelling and interventions in public space. **Each activity responded to its local context** rather than following a fixed model.

Artists played an important role in this process. Working with residents and local partners, they turned complex or contested mobility questions into **experiences that people could see, feel and discuss**. Their role was not simply to decorate a message already decided elsewhere, but to help people explore the questions themselves.

CYCLE UP! went beyond telling people why they should cycle. It explored what makes cycling feel welcome — with the people whose everyday lives are affected.

Read more about the [**CYCLE UP! Artist-in-Residence Programme**](#).

WHAT CITIES LEARNED IN PRACTICE

The following city examples show how **CYCLE UP!’s culture-based approach worked in practice**. Each city focused on a specific local challenge, but the lessons can be useful for other municipalities facing similar issues. The aim of the case studies is to capture what became visible, what worked, what was difficult, and what other cities can adapt. The key question is not only “What did the city do?”, but “What did the city learn?”.

The lessons build on the cities’ different angles to culture-based solutions: **Tartu** used personal cycling stories and a public event setting to bring everyday habits and needs into view; **Prague** used artistic data visualisation to make difficult routes easier to understand; **Katowice** used sound to reveal how traffic shapes the sensory quality of public space, and **Bratislava** used a public festival to connect cycling with creativity and everyday life. Together, they show how culture can open up mobility questions that are difficult to capture through standard planning formats.

The case studies show that **culture-based mobility work is most useful when it helps cities make hidden aspects of mobility visible and turn them into shared learning**. Creative and participatory methods can reveal what formal planning often misses: everyday habits, perceptions, emotions, local knowledge, sensory experience and public trust. They can also help cities test ideas in a low-threshold way before connecting the learning back to discussions and planning.

Culture-based interventions are most useful when they make hidden mobility issues visible and turn them into shared learning.





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City lesson 1: Meet people where they are — cycling stories can become shared learning.

Local challenge

Tartu wanted to increase the visibility of cycling and encourage people to think differently about everyday mobility choices. The challenge was mainly about perceptions, habits and public participation: cycling can be overlooked as part of daily urban life, even when it brings benefits for people and communities.

What was tested

The Cycling Stories intervention took place during Car-Free Avenue. Artist and saxophone player Jana De Troyer invited passers-by to share personal cycling stories, identify favourite cycling places in Tartu, design dream bicycles, suggest bicycle rack ideas, draw bicycles, create wire bicycle sculptures and answer a short questionnaire about cycling habits, needs and barriers.

What happened

The activity created a welcoming, low-threshold space for people to reflect on cycling. Questionnaire responses showed that participants associated cycling with freedom, enjoyment, convenience and wellbeing. A key challenge was local reach: because the lead artist was international, many participants were also from abroad, showing the need for stronger local facilitation and language support.

Transferable lesson

Creative public activities work best in visible places where people naturally pass by, ideally as part of a larger public event. International artistic exchange should be balanced with local facilitation.

Policy takeaway

Use creative street-level engagement to reveal real mobility needs. Policies are shaped on the streets, together with people.

PRAGUE

City lesson 2: Make mobility data visible — but connect it to dialogue.

©Anastasiia Artemyak

Local challenge

Prague wanted to explore how cycling-related research could be communicated in a more accessible and engaging way. The intervention used research on difficult cycling routes and responded to challenges linked to infrastructure, habits and safety. The issue was not the lack of data, but how to make data meaningful for decision-makers and citizens.

What was tested

Artist Chelsea Kim transformed data on challenging cycling routes into an interactive artistic visualisation. Using TouchDesigner, she mapped the routes as particles on a Prague map. When participants pedalled a bike, a magnet on the wheel triggered the particles to intensify, simulating the turbulence of navigating difficult routes.

What happened

The project was easy to explain and helped show decision-makers how artists can make technical data more engaging. However, it remained mainly a data visualisation. Due to time constraints and the nature of the artistic process, it did not develop into broader public engagement or municipal consultation.

Transferable lesson

Artistic data visualisation can make complex mobility information easier to see and discuss. To create stronger policy value, it should be paired with public engagement from the start.

Policy takeaway

Harness art to make mobility data visible and engaging, but connect the output to public dialogue and follow-up decisions.

KATOWICE



City lesson 3: Let people experience what mobility change sounds and feels like.

Local challenge

The intervention responded to the acoustic dominance of car traffic in central Katowice and how it shapes people's perception of the city. Around Supersam, the Rawa river runs largely underground, while the remaining natural elements are only partly audible. The challenge was less about infrastructure and more about habits, perception and sensory awareness.

What was tested

Katowice tested a one-hour bicycle-based sound performance led by sound artist Marcin Dymiter. Participants accessed prepared recordings through QR codes and direct links, played them on smartphones with small Bluetooth speakers, and cycled freely through the area. Each rider carried one fragment of a distributed composition, which later merged into a shared sonic moment.

What happened

The format kept logistics light while creating a strong experiential effect. Participants' own devices mostly worked, although speaker quality varied and spare speakers were needed. Clear instructions helped people feel comfortable. Riding slowly and listening changed how the site was perceived: the buried Rawa, greenery and traffic edge became audible as one connected environment.

Transferable lesson

Sensory formats can engage people who may not attend formal consultations. They can make overlooked urban conditions — such as noise, quiet and the quality of public space — easier to notice and discuss.

Policy takeaway

Treat acoustic quality as part of urban mobility planning. Cultural activities can make the sound impacts of traffic, cycling and public space easier to experience, discuss and act on.

BRATISLAVA



©Marek Jančúch

City lesson 4: Make cycling visible, social and easy to join.

Local challenge

Cycling needs more than infrastructure to become part of everyday life. It also needs to be visible, socially attractive and connected to people's lifestyles, identities and communities. Dobrý trh explored how a large public festival could use arts, culture and public engagement to reach beyond existing cycling communities and support a wider local cycling culture.

What was tested

Cycling was integrated into the festival through bicycle stands, creative programming and participatory art. A public manifesto invited people to reflect on streets and public space. Local cycling initiatives joined the programme, while Hento Toto, an inclusive brand, created original designs for cycling-related communication and merchandise.

What happened

The festival created ways for people to engage with cycling and helped connect cycling with creativity, lifestyle and community. It also brought together civic initiatives, cultural actors, community organisations and the wider public. However, the festival format alone does not show whether exposure led to long-term changes in cycling behaviour.

Transferable lesson

Public cultural events can make cycling visible, enjoyable and socially relevant while strengthening local networks around sustainable mobility.

Policy takeaway

Use major public events to showcase cycling through visible infrastructure, hands-on experiences and creative communication.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The CYCLE UP! experience points to a clear policy message: **cities need to combine physical cycling infrastructure with social, cultural and participatory approaches.** Bike lanes, crossings and parking remain essential. But if cycling is to become a normal everyday choice, cities also need to work with habits, perceptions, trust, identity, public space and local ownership.

The practical shift is simple: **culture is not an add-on used after planning is done. It is a method for listening, testing, communicating and building shared ownership.** Bringing cultural perspectives into planning from the beginning can help cities understand different needs, open dialogue around difficult choices and develop solutions that better reflect people's everyday experiences.

Do not treat culture as an accessory. Use it to make change visible, shared and actionable.

The following **policy recommendations** show how cities can turn cultural potential into practical action - from understanding people's experiences to shaping better mobility decisions.



CYCLE UP! POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

From understanding people to shaping better mobility decisions

1. Understand how people actually experience mobility

- Identify a local mobility challenge and what you need to understand beyond existing infrastructure, plans and data.
- Find out how safe and welcome people feel in public space, including concerns that may go unnoticed.

2. Involve different communities early

- Engage both established cycling advocates and people whose voices are less often heard, working with local organisations to reach them.
- Create accessible ways for people to share their needs and influence decisions before plans feel fixed.

3. Make mobility challenges easier to see, feel and discuss

- Use artistic methods like storytelling, data visualisation or sound-based activities to make complex issues easier to experience and understand.
- Invite participants to share their reactions, explore different perspectives and discuss potential changes.

4. Build on existing methods and work with the artists

- Use CYCLE UP! case studies and the toolkit as inspiration for addressing your city's specific challenges.
- Contact the artists or partners behind an intervention to explore possibilities for collaboration and local adaptation.

5. Make culture part of municipal planning

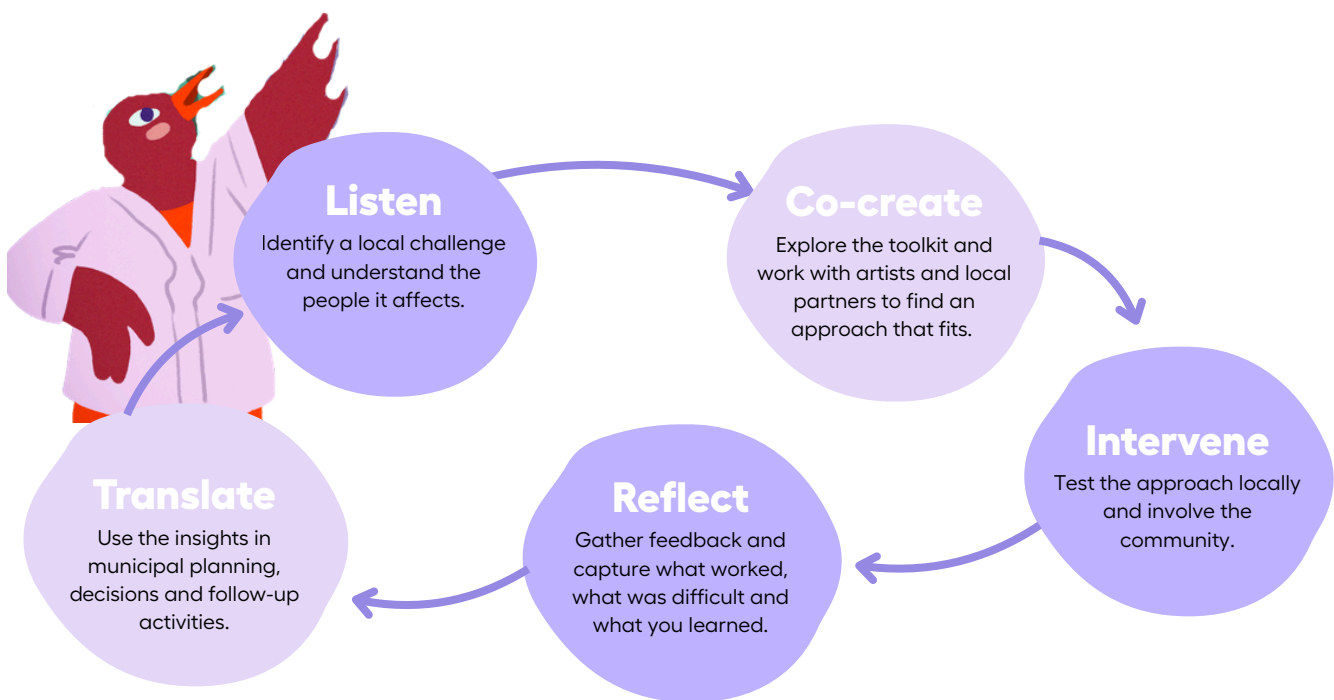
- Recognise the cultural sector as a partner in addressing urban challenges, involving cultural actors and relevant municipal departments from the start.
- Assign responsibility for follow-up and agree how the insights will inform planning, future activities or funding - and communicate what happens next.



FROM POLICY TO IMPLEMENTATION

Cities do not need to wait for perfect conditions nor launch a large programme to start exploring culture-based approaches to mobility challenges. Begin with **one local challenge**, whether it is a street where cycling feels unsafe, a planned change that raises concerns, or people whose voices are missing from mobility discussions.

The **CYCLE UP! toolkit** helps cities explore how to respond through art, creativity and participation. It offers practical guidance and tested approaches that can be adapted to local needs, ideally in collaboration with the artists and partners behind them.



@How to get started with the CYCLE UP! toolkit

CYCLE UP! tested culture-based tools through cycling, but the approach — and the toolkit — are useful wherever urban change depends on trust, participation and local ownership. This is why, if adapted, the **CYCLE UP! tools can travel beyond mobility**.

The lesson is not to copy an activity, but to adapt the approach to your challenge, people and place — and use what you learn to shape future decisions.

Ready to explore what could work in your city? Visit the [CYCLE UP! toolkit](#) for practical methods and inspiration.

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