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Age, Gender and Bicycles

Managing Physical, Spatial and Cultural Borders

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2019

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hagström, C. (2019). *Age, Gender and Bicycles: Managing Physical, Spatial and Cultural Borders*. Abstract from SIEF2019, Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

Total number of authors:

1

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SIEF2019 14th Congress
Santiago de Compostela, Spain
14-17 April 2019

Track Changes: Reflecting on a Transforming World

Age, Gender and Bicycles. Managing Physical, Spatial and Cultural Borders

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short abstract of fewer than 300 characters

Is it important to know how to ride a bicycle? When is it a problem if one can't, why and for whom? The paper focus the role bicycling plays in different stages of people's lives and how it is related to age, a central factor both for how the cyclist is perceived by others and how she sees herself.

long abstract of fewer than 250 words

Is it important to know how to ride a bicycle? What consequences does someone face who do not acquire this skill? When is it a problem, why, at what age, and for whom? This presentation focus on the role bicycling plays in different stages of people's lives and how it is linked to age. Based on material from two studies – life histories collected by the Folklife Archives within a documentation project, and fieldwork from an ongoing research study of bicycle classes for adults (mainly women with immigrant backgrounds) – it centres around norms and notions of who should, and should not, ride a bike, in what situations and for what purposes, as well as assumptions of when and why it is expected to learn how to ride. In Sweden, as in other Scandinavian and northern European countries, the bicycle is an everyday vehicle and has been so for a long time. In other parts of the world the situation is very different. By combining life history material with interviews and observations from the fieldwork it is possible to see similarities and parallels, as well as changes and variations, both from an individual and from a cultural and social perspective. A central factor here is age, both for how the bicyclist is perceived by others and how she sees herself. Age is discussed in relation to when and why bicycling and the ability to ride or not ride a bike is taken for granted or seen as problematic.