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## Riding Through Life : Understanding Life-Histories Through the Bicycle

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Panel: Cycling: past, present and future

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**Paper title:**

Riding through life: understanding life-histories through the bicycle

**Short abstract:**

This paper presents an analysis of a number of responses to an open-ended questionnaire about cycling. Interpreting narratives about their bicycle as material object and their riding abilities, it discusses the independence, freedom and wellbeing that surface in these individuals' life-histories.

**Long abstract:**

This paper presents an analysis of a number of responses to an open-ended questionnaire about cycling. Interpreting narratives about their bicycle as material object and their riding abilities, it discusses the independence, freedom and wellbeing that surface in these individuals' life-histories. This paper, which is based on responses to an open-ended questionnaire about cycling, interprets a number of individuals' life-biography through the bicycle as material object and through the ability to ride it. When describing experiences and emotions associated with cycling, the questionnaire respondents often relate them to specific events in their lives, for example, taking the bike to the grocery store marking a significant move to a new geographic location. Some significant recurring themes are analysed from a life-cycle perspective.

The material is a selection from an on-going documentation project whose aim is to collect stories and memories of, and attitudes towards, bicycling: *Bicycles and bicyclists: yesterday, today, tomorrow*. It is run by The Folklife Archives at Lund University, Sweden. "The questionnaire" is one of several methods applied in the project and has been distributed to the archive's network of regular informants. These are people of different ages and occupations living in various parts of Sweden who answer two to three questionnaires per year about all kinds of topics. This diverse group turned out to include all kinds of cyclists: reluctant practitioners who hardly ever use the bike, everyday cyclists who transport themselves as well as groceries and children in all kind of weathers, as well as passionate riders participating in races.