

*Why Cycling Vanished in the City of Erbil Kurdistan*  
*A Comprehensive Evaluation of Cycling in Erbil*

**Sarbaz Othman**  
**Senior Research Fellow**

University of Kurdistan-Hawler – Vice Chancellor Office  
30 Meter Avenue, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq  
e-mail: [Sarbaz.Othman@ukh.ac](mailto:Sarbaz.Othman@ukh.ac)

**ABSTRACT**

The most important prerequisite for research on cycling is to gather available data relating to cycling for transport. However, unlike motorized transport, focus has not been on research on bicycles as a mode of transport in general. In Iraq, I was not able to find any data collection, statistical analysis or research on cycling as a mode of transport or competitive cycling. This means that I have to start from scratch without any national threshold as a baseline.

Conducting biographic surveys is the only way of collecting data due to limited sources. The idea is to ask people how they travelled in the past, during their childhood and how their parents and other people travelled. The survey showed that cycling was widely used for transportation in Erbil. However during the 1960s and 1970s, it was used as an alternative mode of transportation to private vehicles and public transportation. Bicycle use in Erbil picked during the 1970s where the number of bicycles were close to or even higher than the number of private motorcars. That was despite the fact that the cost of buying a bicycle was very high which equated to 2 months full time labor or 80% of a teacher's monthly salary. The users of bicycles were teenagers, government employees, peddlers, postmen, polices, etc. [1]

The use of bicycles in the city of Erbil, 1 million population, has almost vanished over the last 4 decades. Besides, the city has excellent topography and convenient weather conditions for road cycling. The flat topography with less than 20 m elevation and the roads with a slope of a maximum 0.5%, while the weather for more than 300 days a year is suitable for cycling and not very hot which makes it conducive for cycling [2]. The very limited cyclists in the city who still take risks include competitive cyclists, teenagers, countable western employees at universities and companies, laborers from low-income countries who cannot afford cars and few local people who still unfairly share public roads with car users. Only professionals and competitive cyclists use appropriate dress codes and are concerned about safety equipment such as helmets, reflexes, lamps, etc. [2]

The main reasons for not growing cycling activities at the same rate as car usage were: the economic boom affording people cars, no cycling policies, traffic hazards, lack of infrastructure (only 1,4 km official bicycle road in Erbil) and dissuasion by family and friends. The last mentioned reason stems from socio-cultural perceptions on cycling. In many societies, including Kurdish society, cycling for daily transportation is perceived to be humiliating, and the cyclists are seen as low-skilled poor people, who cannot afford to buy cars.

**Keywords:** declining cycling, cyclist's safety, socio-cultural perceptions of cycling, cycling data.

**REFERENCES**

- [1] Biographic surveys, interviews and archives pictures.
- [2] Data from Erbil Municipality.