Seeking adventure and authenticity: Swedish bicycle touring in Europe during the interwar period

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To cite this article: Martin Emanuel (2017) Seeking adventure and authenticity: Swedish bicycle touring in Europe during the interwar period, Journal of Tourism History, 9:1, 44-69, DOI: 10.1080/1755182X.2017.1342706

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1755182X.2017.1342706

Published online: 20 Jul 2017.

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ABSTRACT
This article examines how young Swedes travelled Europe by bicycle during the interwar period, utilising their travelogues as primary source. Notwithstanding their often limited literary qualities, these accounts offer a valuable tool for capturing peoples’ experiences, motivations, and practices. The article challenges sequential understandings of mobility and instead frames different mobility practices as co-existing but under constant reconfiguration. As car driving emerged and grew, cycling never disappeared, but changed as a practice under the influence of automobility. The pursuit and enjoyment of adventure remained central to cycling in the interwar period – although those involved came from new social groups. The framing of bicycling as an authentic activity even grew stronger. At the same time, cycle touring was reinterpreted as a less comfortable and convenient mode in relation to the competing but still only emergent practice of car touring. Meanwhile, infrastructures were recast to the benefit of motor-powered vehicles. The transformation of roads acted as a catalyst in the reconfiguration between cycling and driving.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 20 July 2015
Accepted 9 June 2017

KEYWORDS
Bicycle touring; bicycle tourism; cycling; mobility practices; travelogues; travel writing

Introduction
Tourism historians, often with an eye to cultural history, are usually sensitive to tourists’ experiences at their destinations, and the meaning production at, and social construction of, these destinations. More rarely do they attend in detail to the mobility involved in tourism – neither the material means of mobility (vehicles, equipment, infrastructures) nor the travelling experience per se.¹ As will be apparent in this article, however, the rewards of displacement in itself, the mobile experience, may be at the core of tourism, at least more adventurous versions of it. And, indeed, material, economic, and social infrastructures are crucial to maintaining any form of tourism, whether it is a package tour or more intrepid travelling. Although some steps have indeed been taken to examine such links, they have by and large focused on car-based mobility, touring and tourism.²

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When mobilities are treated in overviews of tourism history, it is often in the form of a standardised narrative of technical progress: first railways, then automobiles, and later airplanes opened up new possibilities for travelling and tourism. As in mobility history, scholarly treatment of bicycle touring has more often than not been restricted to the pre-car period and is often viewed as a precursor to car-based touring. The focus on novelty renders the history of tourism sequential in terms of mobility; it fails to recognise how tourism always depended on multiple modes of mobility and co-existing practices. For example, cycling receives marginal attention, although in the interwar period it was the most common means of transportation in European cities, and – even if we lack numbers – also for non-collective forms of touring.

If mobility modes and practices are co-existing, they are also competing and in a process of constant reconfiguration. Indeed, even if bicycles by far outnumbered cars throughout the interwar period (and often also well into the post-war period), cars increasingly caught many observers’ imagination. The purpose of this article is to understand – through a reading of travelogues written by Swedes exploring Europe by bicycle in the interwar period – such processes of reconfiguration and shifting power relations. Because even if cycling and cycle touring were widespread, it was increasingly under pressure. As people beyond the wealthiest longed for cars, this change had consequences for how bicycles were understood. This fact was partly but not exclusively grounded in changing norms of comfort and convenience. But we lack cyclists’ insider-perspectives with respect to such revaluations and their motivations to (still) go by bicycle. We also know little about how such reassessments were accompanied and encouraged by changes in the mobility landscape: transformations of roads, lodgings, and other infrastructures. The article makes a case for understanding the reconfiguration of cycling and motoring as an interdependent process of change in user-practices and infrastructures.

In his work on car cultures, Rudy Koshar defines (following William Sewell) practice as the ‘use of a semiotic code to do something in the world’. In driving a car, motorists will adapt to the situation depending on, for example, the type of car they drive, their personality and group identities, as well as the type of road and the wider socio-political relations that produced it. Literature stemming from the ‘practice turn’ in the social sciences tends to emphasise materiality, but also practical activity and bodily performances. Theodore Schatzki, a leading scholar in the field, defines practices as ‘embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organised around shared practical understanding’. Practices are continuously re-created through the faithful enactments of practitioners, but also potentially changed by not-so-loyal performances. Georgina Clarsen has usefully conceptualised cycling as ‘located within a historical

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4For a more general version of this argument, see David Edgerton, The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900 (London: Profile Books, 2006).


Koshar, ‘Driving Cultures’, 17.


constellation of changing mobility practices’. The bicycle journeys of settlers in Australia that she studies were ‘iterations of older practices and assembled a heterogeneous array of novel and familiar elements that would continue to be elaborated throughout the twentieth century in overlaid, multi-modal practices’. Clarsen draws attention to cycling practice as recursive, but also to how one mobility practice may inherit or capture features of another.

It is widely recognised that cycling ‘paved the way’, literally and figuratively, for automobility. Early car producers could build on production methods, marketing techniques, and sales channels that had been refined by the bicycle industry. They also reused technological innovations originally developed for bicycles, such as pneumatic tires, ball bearings, and the use of steel tubing. Meanwhile, motorists benefitted not only from road infrastructures lobbied for by cycling clubs and established for cyclists, but also from prior development of networks of repair shops and overnight accommodation in the countryside. Equally important, a whole ideology of speed and culture of individual mobility, which would later be perfected around the car, first emerged with the bicycle.

As car driving arose and grew, cycling never disappeared. Instead, it changed as a practice under the influence of automobility as the car came within reach of the European middle class. While some traits of cycling were inherited and perfected by automobility, they remained central to cycling – although the practitioners came from new social groups. Cycling as an adventure, featured in many interwar cyclist travelogues, is an example of this. In other respects, cycling transformed in reaction to automobility. In this article, the framing of cycling as an ‘authentic’ activity, more so than car driving, is highlighted using Ning Wang’s reformulation of authenticity in tourism. ‘Existential’ authenticity, Wang argues, has little to do with how genuine a place is, or with the people encountered, but is more about getting closer to one’s truer self, facilitated by the tourist’s activity. Finally, turning to materiality, the transformation of roads acted as a catalyst in the reconfiguration between cycling and driving.

Below I will start by contextualising bicycle-based touring in Sweden and transnationally, before assessing the travelogues that constitute the main primary source for this article and that I want to promote as an underused opportunity to grasp mobility practices. The following sections are devoted to aspirations and motivations to travel Europe by bicycle found in the travelogues – adventure, self-discovery, and the quest for authentic experience being the most important – with special attention to how this was framed through travelling by bicycle rather than by other modes. I will then turn to the changing conditions and sensations of cycling in a European mobility landscape that was becoming increasingly car-oriented. In conclusion I reflect on the reconfigurations of mobility in the interwar period.

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Cycle touring: top-down, from below, (trans)national

In the interwar period, blue- and white-collar workers all over urban Europe appropriated cycling as a way to get to work. In the context of suburbanisation and availability of cheap, mass-produced bicycles, cycling stood out as an efficient and affordable alternative to expensive public transit and over-crowded tramcars and buses. To be sure, cars were not within their reach. Although the 14% rate of bicycle ownership in Sweden in 1930 was low in comparison with many other European countries, bicycles by far outnumbered cars; in 1932, car ownership in Sweden amounted to slightly more than 2%. Moreover, the number of bicycles doubled during the 1930s, ownership reaching about one bicycle per four inhabitants, while the expansion of private automobility waned as compared to the 1920s. In 1947, 50% of Swedes owned a bicycle, which positioned the country in second place among European states behind Denmark.

Many working-class urbanites thus cycled to work. They also increasingly used bicycles in their spare time, answering to the call of fresh air and nature, to an opportunity to escape from the city. In the emerging welfare state of Sweden, the ‘biking holiday’ became what Swedish ethnologist Orvar Lövgren describes as ‘the new form of domestic mass tourism’. In the making of a truly democratic society, Lövgren argues, tourism and leisure had an important function.

The increasing use of bicycles for touring was a European, transnational phenomenon. From a Swedish domestic perspective, it may be understood either as an outcome of the Swedish modernisation project, tailored ‘from above’, or as a result of the aspirations of ordinary people. Most probably it was a combination of both. Considered as a social practice, cycle touring may be understood as framed by broader socio-political projects, while both confirmed and potentially challenged and changed by the participating cyclists in a recursive fashion.

Since the turn of the century, Sweden, like the other Scandinavian countries, had transformed from a predominantly agricultural exporter of food and raw material into a rapidly urbanising, modern industrialised nation. Between the wars, Sweden enjoyed an astonishing economic resurgence relative to the ‘core’ countries of Western Europe. Wages increased as did private consumption among large portions of the Swedish population. At the same time, the working class gained a stronger voice and political reforms friendly to them followed. As all over Europe, the Swedish workers’ and union movement was successful in their demands for shorter working hours and vacation. In 1938, somewhat later than in many other European

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13Sweden’s 14 % in 1930 can be compared to 44 in Denmark, 43 in the Netherland, 27 in Belgium, 25 in Germany, 17 in England and France, and 14 in Italy. Martin Emanuel, Trafikslag på undantag: Cykeltrafiken i Stockholm 1930–1980 (Stockholm: Stockholmia, 2012), 56.


countries, 12 days of paid vacation for all wage-earners was enforced by Swedish labour laws in an attempt to ‘democratise’ leisure.16

Planners, Social-Democratic politicians and nature conservationists shared the ambition to plan leisure and facilitate the pursuit of outdoor life.17 The ambition to plan how people used their newly won leisure time was shared by political elites all over Europe, and the full political spectrum employed leisure policy to foster political loyalty: from the French Popular Front to the totalitarian regimes in Germany and Italy with their state-run leisure organisations Kraft durch Freude and Dopolavoro.18

Indeed, Swedish leisure policy encouraged people to engage in meaningful and, in particular, active leisure activities. It has been argued, however, that this policy would not have been successful had it not been responded to by working-class Swedes who were just as eager to conquer their own bodies and to embrace nature.19 It has even been suggested that in Scandinavia, national identity is uniquely tied to going outdoors. Cycle touring seems to fit well into a more habitually and bodily enacted nationalism than the merely thought of and talked about ‘imagined communities’ proposed by Benedict Anderson as the mould of nations.20

Several Swedish organisations tried to capture the resurgent interest in cycle touring, as did the bicycle industry. The major Swedish producers provided lightweight ‘touring racers’, with changeable gears available as an extra at an additional cost. The Swedish Tourist Association (Svenska Turistföreningen, STF) had, already at the turn of the century, embraced cycling by setting up its own bicycle section devoted to cycling as tourism and recreation as opposed to sports. Like the bourgeois cycling and touring clubs in France, Italy, and the Netherlands, STF framed cycling as a national endeavour: the association encouraged Swedish cyclists to discover Sweden – rather than other nations – and to experience the national landscape in all its diversity.21

Responding to the interwar structural changes within tourism and outdoor recreation, STF abandoned its strictly bourgeois male profile and opened up to youths, women, and workers.22 At the same time, cycling attained renewed interest. The association issued an abundance of material to facilitate both shorter journeys and longer holidays by bicycle, still within the national borders. Even the greatest achievement of the association in the


17For details and full references, see Emanuel, Trafikslag på undantag.


1930s, the setting up of a chain of 319 hostels in 1939, was aligned with cycling. The hostels were placed at moderate cycling distances, and cyclists dominated among the guests during the whole period and some years into the post-war period.23 Many other organisations added cycling as recreation to their programmes in the 1930s. Most importantly, the Cyclists’ Federation (Cykelfrämjandet) was founded in 1934 as the first non-sport bicycle organisation in Sweden since the turn of the century. A few years later the federation opened its own travel agency to serve the expanding number of bicycle tourists both within and outside Sweden, and it sealed deals with tourist stations and hostels that would function as ’bicycle homes’ guaranteeing a cheap stay for its members.24

The phenomenon was transnational: across Europe, leisure cycling increased, new or old organisations offered popular weekend programs to the countryside, and cyclists also benefitted from a growing number of cheap youth hostels.25 Still, there were national traits in European cycling cultures. Although leisure cycling boomed everywhere, in Italy and France, it was paralleled by a strong sportive tradition. In contrast to these countries, with their legendary and immensely popular cycle races, the Tour de France and the Giro d’Italia, Sweden, much like the Netherlands, never developed a national fascination with competitive cycling.26 Whether love of nature and corporeal improvement is a particularly Scandinavian feature or not, Swedes’ bicycle journeys in Europe were individual projects, but the cyclists drew on a vibrant collective and transnational practice of domestic cycle touring.

**Introducing travelogues and travellers**

Bicycle journeys, long and short, thus abounded in the interwar period. Quite a few of them had itineraries stretching beyond national borders. Every issue of Cyklisten, the club magazine of the Swedish Cyclists’ Federation, held information about and accounts of bicycle outings located in the vicinity of major Swedish cities and towns, as well as of longer cycling trips abroad. In the summer of 1937, for example, 14 different trips to seven separate countries were planned and offered to members.27 In 1936, one issue narrated three longer journeys undertaken during the preceding summer: a younger man riding through Denmark and Germany to Spain; a married middle-aged couple going by boat to Britain and France, to cycle back the 1300 km to Sweden; and two male friends on a two-week, 900 km journey to explore the hilly terrain of central Germany. These accounts, while more concise, match some of the themes present in the published narratives analysed below, with frequent comments on the strenuous work when cycling hilly landscapes, the quality of roads, and more or less uncritical encounters with National Socialism in Germany.28

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26 Bill Sund, Backe upp och backe ner: Svensk cykelsport och cykelhistoria i ett internationellt perspektiv (Malmö: Idrottsforum.org, 2012); Rolf Pålsson, ‘Cykeldemokrati och cykelsport till 1900’, Idrott, historia och samhälle (1990): 95–112; Anne-Katrin Ebert, Radelnde Nationen: Die Geschichte des Fahrrads in Deutschland und den Niederlanden bis 1940 (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2010).
28 All articles in Cyklisten 1936: 10.
In this article, however, I will focus on eight longer travelogues detailing bicycle journeys in Europe during the interwar period. These accounts were all written by Swedes and were published as books.\(^{29}\) Three of the authors are women, five men. Most are young and middle class, following in the footsteps of the upper-class cyclists who explored the European continent during the late nineteenth century.\(^{30}\) Even if cycle touring was a cheap way to travel compared to other means, few working-class youngsters would have been able to leave home for weeks and even months assuring that a majority opted for shorter weekend trips.

Most of the cyclists travelled during summer, typically during vacation from work or the summer break from vocational training; for a few, the gap between different phases of life made longer journeys possible. Besides the length of the trip, the form of accommodation was the main way to adapt the journey to one’s economic means. Some used hostels, others relied on camping, while still others continued the older cycling tradition, at least among the wealthy, of staying in hotels. By combining cycling with an occasional train or boat trip, or by hitch-hiking with lorries, the young Swedes were able to ‘jump space’ and personalise their cycle trip.

Considering the itineraries jointly, most Swedish cyclists went to western and central continental Europe: Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Northern Italy, and northeastern France. For decades, these places had been the touchstones of what constituted (‘the real’) Europe. Denmark and Germany were perhaps obvious choices: geographically close, they also served as a gateway to Europe while at the same time offering a familiar terrain linguistically. A few, however, ventured further and travelled through the Baltics, North Africa, or Eastern Europe (Figure 1). Some of these adventurers had goals of edification, conducting new versions of the Grand Tour. Others were on religiously motivated trips. Although some of the travellers went by bicycle because they could afford nothing else, many considered it rewarding in itself to travel by this mode – not least because doing so added to the excitement of the experience and to the quest for finding an authentic self.

These accounts offer another layer in their description of personalities, experiences, motivations, and materialities than do the short accounts published in Cyklisten. They also provide an opportunity to move beyond the perspectives of mediating actors. Several scholars have highlighted the importance of cycling, motoring, and touring clubs in shaping mobility cultures, but we must remember that cycle organisations in the interwar period represented only a tiny fraction of the cycling population. The Swedish Cyclists’ Federation, for example, counted less than 1% of the estimated number of Swedish cyclists as members in 1945.\(^{31}\) Thus, while studying ‘mediation junctions’ is useful for understanding the negotiations between state and civil society actors, the expectations, actions, and experiences of bicyclists themselves are only captured

\(^{29}\) Thus leaving out two that had other geographical scope: Bertil Hult, *Jorden runt på cykel* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1927); Signe Gustafsson, *En tös på cykel: Stockholm-Narvik-Stockholm* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1929).


\(^{31}\) In 1945 there were an estimate 3 million cyclists in the country. The Cyclists’ Federation had 23,000 members. *Cyklisten* 1945: 5, 1. For examples of how mediating actors are used to grasp motoring and cycling culture, see Gijs Mom et al., ‘Civilizing Motorized Adventure: Automotive Technology, User Culture and the Dutch Touring Club as Mediator in the Netherlands’, in *Manufacturing Technology/Manufacturing Consumers: The Making of Dutch Consumer Society*, ed. Ruth Oldenziel and Adri Albert de la Bruhèze (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2009); Ebert, ‘Cycling Towards the Nation.’
indirectly, through the eyes of often elite users. The travelogue on the other hand offers a direct entry point into an immensely popular but still barely noticed interwar touring practice.

As a genre, bread-and-butter travel literature is often ridiculed for its poor literary quality. Referring to shorter pieces published in interwar motoring magazines, Gijs Mom notes how ‘amateur-travellers’ mimicked high-brow travel literature, but in ways that ‘slid into boring, Baedeker-like, matter-of-fact descriptions of roads, landscapes, people, and the technical mishaps of the car’. That is true also for most of the longer travelogues analysed here. Out of the eight, five were issued by more or less recognised publishers and were subject to short reviews in the Swedish library magazine Biblioteksbladet. These typically pointed to the straightforwardness and easy-to-read character of the accounts and to the young age of their probable readers; those that earned the most praise were thought to inspire followers to make similar trips. While these accounts are perhaps not very interesting to the literary historian, they are useful for grasping the very mundanity of mobility practices.

Figure 1. These are the itineraries of Axel Reinarth, travelling Europe and beyond in 1928 on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem (left), and of Lars Hermodsson, exploring the borderlands of Central Europe in 1939 (right). Sources: Axel Reinarth, På cykel genom 16 länder (Stockholm: Harrier, 1935); Lars Hermodsson, Cykelsommar i Europa (Uppsala: Weiland, 1940).

34Biblioteksbladet 1927, 206; 1930, 209; 1931, 167; 1936, 325; 1938, 96.
The straightforwardness of many travelogues does not necessarily mean that they are fully authentic. Travel accounts combine documentary effort with the literary genre; they are meant to be both entertaining and useful for those aspiring to do a similar journey. While the stories may be based on the narrators’ own experiences, details in their description are not necessarily consistent with ‘truth’.\(^3\) For the present analysis this is not crucial, however, since it does not build on the precision of details but rather on the themes that can be discerned in the narratives. While the individual publications may be interesting in themselves (or not), the purpose here is to use the accounts collectively to shed light on cycling practice and to yield a reconfiguration between different forms of mobility beyond individual experiences.

### Narratives of adventure and self-discovery

Scholars of travel writing point to identity as an important aspect of travel and of writing about it. The genre is, according to Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan, an ‘industry of identity, repeating and reconfirming discursively generated images of the foreign and the self’, wherein the psychological content of the journey can be at least as important as the geographical one.\(^3\) In the following sections, I will present the travellers/narrators in more depth, homing in on their motivations to travel Europe by bicycle and on how they represented themselves, that is, how the journeys were part of their self-creation.

During the interwar period many Europeans could travel or had officially sanctioned vacations for the first time. Figures suggest that out of a Swedish population of 6.1 million in 1930, almost 31,000 travelled to Norway and 35,000 to Germany. Out of the total populations of the Scandinavian countries, approximately 12.5 million, 27,000 travelled to Great Britain, 37,000 to Switzerland or Austria, while 62,000 Scandinavians and Dutch people travelled to Italy.\(^3\) Although these figures refer to organised trips, mainly by bus, it is safe to say that only a very small number of Swedes travelled abroad in the interwar period.\(^3\)

A search for adventure was part and parcel of the accounts written by Swedish cyclists travelling Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. But adventure came in different forms. Closely linked to the voluntary challenge, the dominant Western meaning of adventure has been shaped by European exploration and colonisation, and, as such, it has intensely masculine connotations. Tourism scholar Carl Cater stresses that adventure is context-dependent and also highly individual, but is always characterised by uncertainty, challenge, and the presence of risk. Risk is ‘integral to the adventurous

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experience’, but it can come in different forms: physical, mental, social, or financial. Adventure may be ‘a state of mind and spirit as much as a physical challenge’. Such a perspective invites alternatives to the male enterprises of hardship, exploration, and dominancy.

According to mobility historian Gijs Mom, car culture inherited from the early bicycle culture a ‘tripartite adventure’ of racing, touring, and tinkering. Initially developed by the aristocracy for racing, cars turned into speedy touring machines for continental trips in the US and Europe shortly after the turn of the century. Compared to bicycles, cars offered their (mostly male) drivers more of the same in terms of speed, acceleration, and ability to conquer space. That cars were highly unreliable technologies only added to the adventure, as it made tinkering a ubiquitous part of car culture. Before and especially during the interwar period, the car adventure was, in Mom’s words, ‘tamed’, adapted to middle-class families’ demand of comfort, and closed off from its surroundings. ‘Electric starters, closed bodies, glass windows, better sound insulation, cloth seats, more informative dashboard interiors’, Koshar argues, added up to a ‘domestication’ of the car.

Cars offered adventure to upper-class men and later middle-class families, but the bicycle never lost its ability to offer excitement. Speed of travel aside, in terms of distances covered and hardships endured, for Swedish cyclists travelling Europe their pedal-powered machines offered much the same opportunity for adventure enjoyed by more well-off explorers 30 years before. Tinkering or, as framed by Mom, ‘functional adventure’, was always present. Most of the travellers had smaller misfortunes (and also a few breakdowns) and were able to make simple repairs, such as mending a flat tire, using tools they brought themselves or borrowed in a repair shop. Almost as many women (travelling on their own) as men wrote travel accounts of their journeys. This does not necessarily mean that cycling abroad was equally common among the sexes, but it does indicate that it was not a fundamentally male practice. As we will see, however, female risk-taking and adventurousness differed from male versions.

For Stig Pallin, his 1926 bicycle journey is most accurately characterised as a boyish undertaking. Indeed, his account was published as part of a ‘boy adventure series’. That summer Pallin and a friend embarked on a three-month trip from Rouen outside Paris, south through France, along the Spanish Mediterranean coast and by boat to Melilla in Spanish Morocco before continuing by bicycle to Alger. He returned by boat from Alger to Marseilles, cycled to Paris and then headed on through Germany to Sweden.

Only in his twenties, for Pallin and his companion, the challenge was to travel utilising few financial resources and to endure harsh conditions. In Spain, after running out of money, the two young men slept under the open sky with small portions of porridge and oranges as their only food. Traversing primitive roads in the Pyrenees, braving pestering flies, and facing 50°C heat in Morocco were more challenging obstacles. And when the

41Mom, Atlantic Automobilism, 49–113; Koshar, ‘Driving Cultures and the Meaning of Roads.’
Swedish consul in Cartagena tried to dissuade the young men from going to Melilla because inland roads were lacking and the area was politically unstable, Pallin thought that made the path ahead even more attractive, fostering ‘a secret yearning for getting there after all’.

Passing the Spanish-French Moroccan border, they found shelter for the night in a fortress on the Spanish side that further satisfied their search for adventure:

It was a night that several thousand other boys would have envied us, for there we were, two Stockholm lads, alone with two Arabs on the most remote outpost towards Spanish Morocco, that was to be sure something every boy would have wanted to experience.

The exposed situations, torments even, lent the narrative the intended adventurous flavour.

Beginning his trek in May 1929, Uno Cederberg pursued cycling for the primitive and authentic experience it can provide. Cederberg and a friend set off on an 80-day long bicycle tour in Europe, starting in southern Sweden, they moved north along the Swedish Baltic Sea coast before riding along the Finnish coast, through the Baltic countries to Poland and on to central Europe. After weeks of trekking over the Sudeten Mountains and the Alps, the pair circled back north through Germany to their point of departure.

Cederberg was of moderate means and grew up in the Swedish countryside outside the small city of Borås. Probably for economic reasons, the two young cyclists brought along their own camping gear and cooking equipment to avoid prohibitively expensive stays in hostels, inns, or hotels. The discomforts of camping life in Sweden were made worse because of the particularly cold summer that year. It poured rain frequently, as they moved north it snowed, and if that was not enough they faced an onslaught of mosquitoes. During the long distances spent looking for places to stay in northern Sweden, the stormy nights braved in East Prussia, and the lonely wanderings around in the Alps, their hardships, fatigue and hunger were almost unbearable at times. Unlike Pallin, whose account celebrated the adventure of such hardships, Cederberg felt endurance had its own rewards:

We had not given up to convenience; we would not be led astray, past the difficulties and hardships, the great experiences, the mighty impressions and the grand sights. In spite of our pace, we stood in intimate contact with people, with the grandeur of nature and attended the school called life.

Whereas Pallin celebrated boyish adventure, Cederberg emphasised discipline and endurance, the satisfaction of ascetic primitivism (Figure 2).

Five years later, in July 1934, Oscar Carlsson departed from Umeå in northern Sweden for a one-month bicycle journey in north-western Europe. In Berlin, his main destination, he joined the Baptist World Congress before heading back to Sweden. Carlsson’s trip was, like the previous examples, occasionally a strenuous one. On his way from Paris to Berlin, he experienced multiple misfortunes. During a single day, stuck in hailing rain and faced with grave difficulty finding shelter, he covered 280 kilometres before dropping down with exhaustion and falling asleep on the ground under an open sky. Losing his wallet and enduring another two days without food, cycling was increasingly tiresome, but he

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44 Ibid., 151.
managed to wire for money and to get to Berlin where he received help from fellow Baptists.46

There were exceptions to the male risk-takers. As a student of the German language (and later a professor in Uppsala), Lars Hermodsson, then just 24 years old, belonged to the more politically curious travellers of the 1930s. Setting out just before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Hermodsson brothers, both students in Uppsala, took off for a two-and–a-half-month European bicycle journey, interspersed with an occasional train trip, in an effort to reach Rome. Their exploration of Europe’s sights was not intrinsic to cycling or self-exploration, but an effort to explore a Europe ensnared in a politically hopeless situation.47

Another form of primarily male adventure was ‘touristic imperialism’, defined by Gijs Mom as a subcategory of the spatial adventure.48 Travelling the European periphery or just beyond – in North Africa, Mediterranean Europe, or the Baltic countries – a few cyclists defined Europe through reflections on ‘the other’, supposedly non-European.49

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47 Lars Hermodsson, Cykelsommar i Europa (Uppsala: Weiland, 1940), 4.
49 See, for example, Axel Reinarth, På cykel genom 16 länder (Stockholm: Harrier, 1935), 122–5, 140, 146; Pallin, En Stockholmsgrabb i Afrika, 134; Cederberg, Europa runt på 80 dagar, 110.
In doing so, they confirmed longstanding assumptions about (West) European rationality and modernity in contrast to a backward East, whether located in Eastern Europe or in the Middle East.

In 1928 Axel Reinharth, like Carlsson a dedicated Baptist, made a religiously motivated six-month cycle trip through Europe and North Africa, the Holy City of Jerusalem being his premier destination. Travelling with two friends during a leave from his parish service, half the trip back to Sweden was covered by bus, boat, and train. Considering the length of his trip, and the fact that he spent most nights in a tent, Reinarth’s account is remarkably unadventurous compared to many others’. His journey was a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; to experience Jerusalem was the most memorable moment of his life. Yet Reinarth’s account excels in degrading comments about the poor hygiene of Italians, the laziness of North Africans, hot-tempered Arabs, hedonist shortcomings and the shallowness of Catholics’ faith in southern Europe.50 In terms of othering, Reinarth had good company in Pallin and Cederberg.51

The narratives of othering, endurance, and male irresponsibility differ from the women’s adventures discussed below, which, more than anything, were framed by a desire for emancipation. In scholarship on gender and travel, female travellers are often said to stand out both from male travellers anxious to discover their masculinity and from those women who conformed to their conventional role in the home. Entering the predominantly male world of travelling, it is argued, provided women with an opportunity to recreate themselves and their gender roles.52

In the early fall of 1930, the upper-class Karin Johnsson embarked on the quintessential feminist quest for female autonomy by cycling from Copenhagen, Denmark to Ravenna, Italy, passing through Germany, the Swiss Alps by train, and on by bicycle through northern Italy to the Adriatic Sea. For Johnsson, the trip’s purpose was to examine ‘how safe a woman can feel on the country roads without any other protection than that, which she can accomplish herself’. As a can-do narrative she succeeded; as a woman she did not experience any obstacles, which was ‘of course excellent’, but also ‘a bit awkward’, because she and others also expected exciting adventures in such a journey.53

Throughout her narrative, 40-year-old Johnsson flagged her cultural gravitas by referencing, for example, the Thirty Years War, Luther’s Wittenberg, Goethe’s and Schiller’s Weimar (‘the Athens of Germany’), and the Ferrara Art School. In the encounters with her social peers, Johnsson defined herself as a well-educated woman with a sense of history fulfilling the class expectations of her background, yet also a decidedly modern woman: rational, down-to-earth, and calm rather than romantic, nostalgic, fragile, and emotional (Figure 3).

During her journey, Johnsson maintained a rigorous daily distance, allegedly averaging 150–200 kilometres per day (although the experienced touring cyclist may doubt whether this was possible aboard a single-speed bicycle). Caught in a downpour in Germany, Johnsson remarks ‘the weather gods incited [a] go-ahead spirit’.54 Passing through

50Reinarth, På cykel genom 16 länder, 122–5, 140, 146.
51See, for example, Pallin, En Stockholmspröb i Afrika, 134; Cederberg, Europa runt på 80 dagar, 110.
53Karin Johnsson, I nöd och lust genom Europa: Öden och äventyr under en cykelfärd till Italien (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1931), 7, 142–3.
54Ibid., 29.
Danish Zealand, she found little of historical interest and thus little reason to stop, resulting in an alternative spatial perspective: ‘But the speed as well has its value, if one wants to catch a country in the perspective of a cross-section’.\(^5\) In her narrative, Johnsson used her bicycle as an instrument of freedom, emancipation, and speed.

In September 1936, another woman, Ingrid Jerdén, also embarked on a journey of self-discovery, leaving her home town of Malmö for a bicycle trip to Paris and back again. For the young Jerdén, a recent graduate in art from Lund University and daughter of an engineer, the bicycle trip was a quest for cultural learning in preparing her to become a writer. The journey offered her opportunities to practice languages, to see new places, to better understand the peoples she encountered, and to study the arts and architecture of different countries.\(^6\)

Like Karin Johnsson, Jerdén eagerly projected herself as an active, modern, and independent woman, repeatedly stressing the surprised responses when she told the people she met about her journey: a young woman travelling all the way from Sweden to Paris, alone, and by bicycle! Was this brave, foolhardy or simply strange? In Paris, she encountered the opposite to what biking meant for her: an instrument of emancipation. Parisian women were all but ‘sporty’ in their high-heels, lacking autonomy. She spotted her first

\(^5\)Ibid., 12–13.

female cyclists between Paris and Fontainebleau, ‘but don’t you think that they were on their own or on a long tour like me!’ No, French female cyclists depended on their men: on tandem bicycle, of course, with a polite gentleman in the front seat, and the girls’ contribution was limited to decoratively sitting in the back, letting the one in front toil for two. … I never spotted them in motion, but then perhaps their destination was not that distant?57

During a summer in the late 1920s, Karin Maria Johansson and her three childhood friends – one a student, three earning their own money – left Sweden for a two month bicycle trip in Germany. During the three preceding summers the four women had already explored Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. For their fourth trip, they ventured outside ‘safe’ Scandinavia, going against warnings at home about trafficking of white women on the continent – hinting at the perceived (bodily/sexual) risks confronted by young women venturing off by themselves.

All in their early twenties, the women travelled in a leisurely pace, pausing at every turn. The bicycle was not central to their narrative as in the cases mentioned above, nor did they try to demonstrate their independence in the same way. With no tools for maintaining their bikes or equipment to fix a flat tire, they relied on men and boys along the way, they took every opportunity to hitchhike and occasionally they brought their bikes along on trains. Still, with their cheerfulness and drive, Johansson and her friends portrayed themselves as liberated in a gay and jovial sense (Figure 4). They too performed a sort of bodily emancipation by contrasting their sporty appearance and unfeminine

Figure 4. Karin Maria Johansson and her friends portrayed themselves as emancipated and sporty young women, in contrast to their German peers. For a bicycle journey, however, they frequently hitched rides from trucks and occasionally travelled by train. Photo in Karin Maria Johansson, Landsvägen lockar: Fyra svenska flickor på cykel genom Tyskland (Stockholm: Åhlén & Åkerlund, 1929). Photographer unknown.

57 Ibid., 122.
clothing (trousers, shirt, tie) to German women’s ‘long dresses and awkward underpants’, long hair and jewellery.58

Men and women alike embarked on bicycle journeys during the interwar period, but their accounts reveals different, gendered, stories of adventure, risk-taking, and self-discovery: narratives of male irresponsibility, on the one hand, and female emancipation on the other. Women travelling through foreign territories on their own were often deemed irresponsible by their contemporaries, but this was a very different irresponsibility, often vaguely connected to sexual risk, to that of men who constantly got into trouble due to a lack of planning or over-zealous searching for a challenge. Women continued the tradition of late nineteenth-century feminist cyclists who appropriated the bicycle for emancipatory purposes, in terms of dress codes, access to public space, and extended freedom of movement.59

**Rural corridors and the authentic cycling experience**

Cycling through Europe, Stig Pallin and Uno Cederberg positioned their narratives, to use Paul Fussell’s terminology for describing the ways in which people embark on going elsewhere, between that of explorers and travellers. The others were genuine travellers, retaining what they could of the explorative unpredictability but fusing it with the tourist’s pleasure of ‘knowing where one is’.60 Even so, all of them anxiously sought to avoid the clichés of tourism. Visiting Italian Como, Karin Johnsson points out that the city was rightfully praised for its beauty, but she also expressed distaste for the way tourists appropriated the city:

> Thousands of tourists pour in here annually, open-mouthedly staring at the villas, dutifully admiring the sky-blue water of the lake, mumbling ‘wunderschön’, ‘wonderful’ or ‘admirable’, sending postcards to friends and acquaintances and put a mark in their Baedeker, never to forget this unforgettable place.61

According to Johnsson, these tourists were not able to reach the ‘backstage’ of the visited locations.62 Karin Maria Johansson and her companions, visiting the German city of Meissen, gazed at all the tourists running around, all hot and sweaty. By comparison, they almost felt like ‘natives’:

> It was a lovely feeling to be absolutely free and independent, and we felt certain compassion with all those, who now needed to make use of the Sunday hours. What were their cars, silk dresses and hotel dinners against our freedom, freedom to follow every whim?63

To Johansson, the relative detachment from the toured objects depended on the mode of travelling. Tourism by train, but also by car, allegedly meant to distance oneself from the local community. Lars Hermodsson joined the refrain, criticising the tourism industry and

58Karin Maria Johansson, Landsvägen lockar: Fyra svenska flickor på cykel genom Tyskland (Stockholm: Åhlén & Åkerlund, 1929), 149.
59On cycling and women’s emancipation in the late nineteenth century, see, for example, Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990).
61Johnsson, *I nöd och lust genom Europa*, 100–1.
its ‘giant dull hotel palaces … glimmering spots of dirt on the beauty of Switzerland …’. Could the Rockefellers not feel satisfied with smaller, more beautiful nationally Swiss dwellings? Yet, he also showed he was aware of participating in the somewhat comical ‘custom, that every tourist curses other tourists’. Travelling as a cyclist, Hermodsson argued, offered opportunities to make closer contacts with locals. The curious eyes they met when arriving in Italian cities by bicycle were quickly gone once they were re-dressed as proper tourists. Considered as mere tourists, Hermodsson felt a sudden wall between himself and the locals.64

These cyclists all allude to what Nina Wang calls object-based authenticity; they pointed to tourists’ failure to relate to the toured objects (cities, villages, people) in a genuine fashion.65 Although we cannot judge if Johansson and Hermodsson were really more successful in reaching ‘backstage’, in their accounts, the bicycle, or rather the down-dressed and casual conduct that came with a bicycle journey, was a key to the authentic experience, in contrast to that of tourist crowds.

As we will see below, in other parts of the cyclists’ accounts, authenticity lies not so much in their relationship to the toured objects as it does to finding one’s ‘authentic self’. In contrast to object-based authenticity, Wang develops the notion of an activity-based, ‘existential’ authenticity: lived and not least bodily experienced. From this point of view, the authenticity of cycle touring has little to do with whether the nature being toured or the places and peoples encountered are ‘authentic’ in the sense of being genuine or untouched by civilisation. Rather, removed from daily constraints of modern societies, the cyclists could indulge more freely in self-expression. They were, in Wang’s words, engaged in ‘a search of their authentic selves with the aid of activities or toured objects’.66

These cyclists carved out a particular slice of the European continent: a rural corridor. They focused on landscape rather than on urban skylines. While interested in the tradition-loaded cities, Johnsson preferred to pass by ‘giant cities’ and agglomerations like Frankfurt am Main–Mainz–Wiesbaden when biking. Travelling through Hamburg, Köln and the Ruhr area, ‘the industrial heart of Germany’, Carlsson repeatedly frowned upon the noisiness of modern traffic and the constant outlets from factories, which made him contemplate if humans had become ‘a slave under the treadmill of industrialism’.67 Others avoided larger cities such as Berlin and Paris altogether – Cederberg, for example, sought for the freedom and fresh air rather than to ‘thread the streets of large cities’. Still others did visit these cities but did not experience them by bicycle.68

That the narratives focus on the landscape and on travelling per se, rather than on cities visited on the way, may have many reasons. For one, travelling Europe by bicycle meant spending much time on the road. But the importance of the cyclists’ search for the ‘authentic’ experience should not be underestimated. Their preference for rural landscapes was one of several ingredients of the cyclists’ quest for authenticity, and one that was in keeping with the prevalent ideology of outdoor recreation. From its outset before the turn of the century, bourgeois organisations promoted excursions in nature as a

64Hermodsson, Cykelsommar i Europa, 43–4, 51–2.
65Wang, ‘Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience.’
66Ibid.
68Cederberg, Europa runt på 80 dagar, 112–13.
compensation to industrialisation, urbanisation, and the perceived degradation of city life.69 The Swedish Cyclists’ Federation continued this tradition. In 1936, the editor of the club magazine *Cyklisten* articulated a twofold compensatory idea of the bicycle tour. On the one hand, people wished ‘out and away from the everyday, from congestion and crowding in the large cities … to come closer to nature and enjoy the balm of the soul that the stillness and loneliness offer’. They also wished ‘away from the deadly monotonous and stereotype, ever recurrent grip of mechanisation, back to the personal efforts of self-activity’.70 The cycle tour combined the joy of getting by using nothing but one’s own force with escape from urban landscape. It offered a close encounter with Mother Nature. In this, there appears to have been correspondence between cyclists’ own yearnings and the ideology of the Cyclists’ Federation.

The feeling of authenticity in cycling was fed also by the intimate position of the cyclist vis-à-vis his or her surroundings. Gijs Mom describes how the multi-sensorial user experience of pre-war motorists was challenged by the encapsulation of the car (from open to closed cars) during the interwar period, and how the visual experience was given priority to other senses. Particular efforts were made to reduce and engineer the sounds of car driving.71 The bicycle made possible an alternative experience. Not only could a cyclist more easily deviate from the beaten track. The bodily sensations often equalled visual impressions in the narratives of the cycling travellers, expressed not least in terms of fatigue and sore muscles after a long day’s exhaustive cycling. Riding in mountainous landscapes had its special challenges. Carlsson found descending the Mosel Valley ‘almost as gruelling as going uphill’ and his ‘calves ached from the efforts to reduce the speed … to the level of decency’.72 As a consequence, to spare themselves and their bicycles from excessive strain, many cyclists occasionally walked their machines when travelling in hilly terrain.

As already noted, Cederberg found reward in his strenuous journey. He had not ‘subsumed to comfort’ and in that way he had arrived at a deeper understanding of himself, finding pride in the fact that he and his friend had to rely on ‘nothing but our own force’. They depended on their ‘calves rather than travel checks’ and were moreover submerged in nature rather than mere passers-by having a glance. Approaching the end of his journey/account, he noted that it had taught him ‘to love the pleasure of high pace – speed as physical accomplishment’.73 Another example: while Johnsson admitted that the offshoots of the Alps into Italy made the journey quite exhausting, she found that the effort was ‘rewarded by the wastingly generous nature’.74

These ambiguous notions of exhaustion from cycling can be related to existential authenticity, which according to Wang has an important bodily dimension. As the ‘primary organ of sensibility or feeling’, the body (as much as the mind) may be the locus of authenticity, or alienation. If, in the workplace, the body is ‘the object of self-control, self-constraint, and organisational manipulation’, Wang argues, then ‘in tourism the body

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74Johnsson, *I nöd och lust genom Europa*, 19, 120.
becomes “subject” in its own right’. Wang cites the beach, for example, as a place of complete relaxation and consumption of bodily desires during a temporary pause from modern society.\(^75\) As is evident from the accounts studied here, however, hard work and exhaustion may be – at least when removed from one’s daily duties – equally rewarding and conducive to existential authenticity.

The travellers also make reference to the sounds of cycling, for example, the screaming of brakes when racing downhill. The audible experience was commonly articulated, in fact, as the (almost) absence of sounds. When cycling towards the north of Sweden, Cederberg expressed his satisfaction with having a perfectly balanced load on his bicycle:

The equipment today seems exceptionally well packed and balanced. The spinning of the chain and the sound of friction from the rubber rings against the road’s grains of sand is for long moments the only thing that disturbs the calm and peace.\(^76\) Reinarth noted ‘the monotonous threading of the pedals … “Tick, tick, tick” sounded the meter on the front wheel, as it added kilometre after kilometre’. And touring between Dutch cities in spring, he touted the marvellous flower fields: ‘We just looked and looked, while kilometre after kilometre we pedalled the bicycles more like a monotonous habit’.\(^77\) These were the transcendental sounds of perfect harmony, in which it appears as if the machine was doing its job with maximum efficiency. Cycling the Vosges with its beautiful views, Jerdén marvelled: ‘I could not take my eyes off this magnificent spectacle of nature … and did not notice, that the bicycle carried me forward’.\(^78\) Relying on ‘one’s own force’ – a phrase that was proudly repeated by representatives of the Cyclists’ Federation – the ‘cyborg’ experience of cycling differed substantially from the more aggressive version articulated by motorists who saw power instantly multiplying under the pressure of a foot.\(^79\)

Common for many of the cyclists, touring Europe in the interwar period was a search for an authentic experience, whether it implied an intimate encounter with nature or one’s own body, or implicated one’s distance to tourists. While travelling by car involved the same escape from the city, it took a larger effort to reconcile the car with nature.\(^80\) Proponents of cycling were not late to promote the bicycle as a more ‘natural’ machine.\(^81\) By making possible journeys on ‘simpler roads and paths’, Swedish road engineer and cycling lobbyist Gustav Dahlberg argued in 1933, ‘the cyclist comes closer to undisturbed and untouched nature than is possible on beaten tracks, which through ongoing modernisation unfortunately appears more rigid and hard than before’.\(^82\) By modernisation Dahlberg implied the ongoing adaptation of Swedish roads for automobiles. As we will see below, this material transformation influenced experiences and representations of cycling.

\(^{76}\)Cederberg, Europa runt på 80 dagar, 27.
\(^{77}\)Reinarth, På cykel genom 16 länder, 14, 23, 27.
\(^{78}\)Jerdén, Med parisluft i bakslangen, 136.
\(^{79}\)Emanuel, Trafikslag på undantag, 84–6; Mom, Atlantic Automobilism, 166.
\(^{81}\)See, for example, Sven Haglund, ‘Cykeln och reselivet’, Cyklisten 1936 (8): 5–6, 22.
\(^{82}\)Gustaf Dahlberg, Cykelbanor och cykeltrafik (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1933), 10.
Cycling automobilised landscapes

In the past, theorists of practices such as Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu focused on classically ‘social’ phenomena, such as ‘shared understandings, norms, meanings, practical consciousness, and purposes’. More recently, practice scholars highlight the importance also of material resources and configurations. In this section we will approach how continuity and change of the materialities of cycling, such as bicycles and their affordances and road infrastructures, contributed to the relative competitiveness of mobility practices: cycling, car driving, and train travelling.

Although the bicycle is often depicted as an incredibly stable technology in its overall structural design, the first half of the twentieth century saw many innovations such as lighter materials, better brakes, gears, as well as an arsenal of other appliances to improve the usefulness of the bicycle. David Herlihy has pointed to how European tourists in the interwar period adopted bicycles specifically designed for long-distance touring. Swedish producers, however, provided multiple gears only as an extra. Moreover, the interwar period saw the emergence of a plain ‘mass bicycle’ mainly for commuting purposes, available in multiple colours but stripped of any exclusive, expensive details.

In fact, none of the cyclists who published their travel accounts seem to have travelled on new bicycles, and none made any mention of gearing. As already observed, many dismounted their bicycles when travelling mountainous and hilly terrain. On the other hand, if they indeed rode single-speed bikes, some covered astonishing daily distances. In any case, bicycles continued to foster feelings of independence and freedom in much the same way as they had in the late nineteenth century. Back then, the bicycle had kick-started individual mobility, brought new notions of time and space, and often been depicted as a technology of freedom, liberation, and individuality. This understanding of cycling continued to thrive among devoted cyclists during the interwar period. Especially when picking up cycling after some days’ pause in urban environments, the travellers expressed feelings of relief. Leaving Reval after a 10-day long stay, Cederberg exclaimed: ‘We felt like a pair of wild birds, we had finally escaped and could enjoy fresh air and freedom again.’ Similarly, departing from Paris, Jerdén felt a relief to be pedalling again. Even Johansson and her friends expressed the freedom of cycling when getting back in their saddles after multiple hitch-hiking and train experiences:

There was nothing that could compare to pedalling, the smooth, rhythmic pedalling. Lots of cars passed by, but to what interest where they to us now. We had our fiery steel horses to rely on, and so we put village after village behind us.

In particular when comparing train travelling with cycling, the bicyclists stressed the flexibility and independence afforded by their machines. After a breath-taking train journey

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83Shove et al., The Dynamics of Social Practice, 8–10.
85Paul Rosen, Framing Production: Technology, Culture, and Change in the British Bicycle Industry (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Christina Zetterlund, Design i informationsåldern: Om strategisk design, historia och praktik (Stockholm: Raster, 2002), 139–44.
87Cederberg, Europa runt på 80 dagar, 112; Jerdén, Med parisluft i bakslangen, 21.
from Basel to Lugano, Johnsson collected her bike and prepared to ‘set out alone towards the unknown. Again I felt free and happy’. According to Jerdén, one charm of travelling by bicycle was not to know exactly when one would arrive. When buying her train ticket from Berlin back to Sweden, Jerdén was held late by the assistant in the ticket window. Hurrying to the platform, she arrived just in time to catch the train:

The train was waiting. Half a minute before it took off, I came running with my bag. I was used to deciding my departure time myself. There lies the charm of a bicycle trip. You come and go, whenever you please, and still have the time to look around in a completely different way than e.g. behind the car’s steering wheel.

Cycling was thus considered a more flexible choice relative to travelling by train. Indeed, the understanding of the train as inflexible had grown strong with the emergence of the new means of transportation: bicycles and cars. This is thus an example of how novelties would render ‘older’ technologies, not obsolete, but in a different light. In other respects, the car would do the same to the bicycle.

The bicycle was also, as previously noted, a tool for a more authentic experience compared to going by car. These characteristics of cycling had to be balanced against the comfort and convenience of car and train travelling. Travelling by bicycle meant, for example, certain limitations for young women concerned about appearance and how to fit in socially. Although her clothes normally lent her a desired air of sportiness, when arriving in Oldenburg in ‘dusty clothes’ Jerdén felt she did not quite match the city’s Sunday-dressed flâneurs. Walking down the Champs Élysées she felt a bit underdressed among all fashionable ladies, as she did in the ‘continental atmosphere’ on board the Paris–Milano express train, on which she rode a small portion of her trip. But there was not much to do, since there was simply no room for a ‘Paris creation’ in a small bicycle trunk.

Likewise, many of the travellers occasionally opted for a train journey or to get a ride with a passing truck. Bringing along 23 kilograms of luggage, Lars Hermodsson regularly complained about the hilly terrain, particularly in the mountainous parts of Italy with the insufferable summer heat. Reaching Florence, they decided to go to Rome, their southernmost stop, by train. The over-crowded coupé was a relief rather than a nuisance. ‘After all it was an inexpressible pleasure to be spared lying like a beast of burden along the country road, but instead gliding past hills and villages, quickly and comfortably’.

As pleasant as it was to experience nature and to feel the freedom of the open road, there was a trade-off. The need to complete journeys on time and to find safe places to sleep demanded careful planning. Sometimes going slowly in one area demanded racing through another. Many of the narratives convey a feeling of rush and haste, with surprisingly few moments of rest and relaxation. Cederberg and his companion felt forced to keep a ‘fairly decent cruising speed’ to make up for the time-consuming activities of provisioning, cooking, and loading and unloading their luggage. They ‘wanted to get as far away as

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89 Johnsson, I nöd och lust genom Europa, 98.
90 Jerdén, Med parisluft i bakslangen, 173.
91 Ibid., 204.
94 Hermodsson, Cykelsommar i Europa, 66.
possible, all in the amount of time that was determined by our own endurance and our own limited resources.95

In Oscar Carlsson’s narrative, the romanticising of bicycle-based camping life and appreciation of car-based comfort is juxtaposed in a passage where a Norwegian company travelling in a luxurious car enters the calm and quiet farmer’s garden and raises their tent next to his. This brought two conflicting results. On one hand, Carlsson’s previous state of mind, in full harmony with nature, was quickly disrupted. On the other hand, he was invited to a dinner he could only dream of as a touring cyclist:

The ladies in the worthy company now started to prepare something culinary, and out of the car’s interior they collected canned food, vegetables, bread and a lot of odds and ends, which was appetisingly served on a white cloth spread on the meticulously cut lawn.96

Going by bicycle thus had its limitations with regards to loading capacity of both clothes and food stuffs, narrowing down the options of a long-distance trip compared to those available to someone travelling in other ways. While the bicycle brought with it feelings of independence, flexibility and a more authentic experience, for those who cared, it often also implied travelling in haste and with less class. Importantly, these understandings of cycling developed fully only when automobility started to appear as a reasonable alternative.

During the interwar period many European countries embarked on large-scale adjustments of roads to the ‘demands’ of motorised traffic. While in many countries blueprints for automobile-only highways were developed, such plans were realised (in the interwar period) only in totalitarian Italy and Germany, and to some extent in the Netherlands. Given the low levels of automobility at the time these roads were clearly built ahead of demand. Even so, the ‘improvement’ of existing national road networks was at the top of traffic policy agendas in many countries and roads were broadened, straightened, and fitted with smoother surfaces.97 In Sweden, the 1920s was a decade of ‘road revolution’. The motoring lobby agreed on the introduction of an automobile tax in 1922, supported it even, given that the revenues were used to improve the national roads. The road network increased only moderately during the decade, but national expenditure on roads more than doubled within a seven-year period; it covered road maintenance and adaptation to car traffic rather than an extension of the network.98

According to Swedish road engineers, the expansion of cycling in Sweden during the 1930s resulted in part from the smoother surfaces and wider roads – measures intended for automobility and funded by car taxes. While new surfaces may have facilitated cycling, road engineers, policy-makers, and motorists’ lobby groups increasingly found that cyclists threatened the free flow of cars. Thus, close to cities in particular, cycle lanes were constructed when roads were ‘modernised’ for car use. Separate cycle paths for recreational purpose, such as were constructed in the Netherlands and in Denmark,
were installed only sparingly, since they did not ‘relieve’ roads from bicycles, but had to be built for cyclists only.\footnote{Regarding bicycle lanes and roads in Sweden and Denmark, see Emanuel, \textit{Trafikslag på undantag}, 70–90. For Germany, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, see, for example, Volker Briese, ‘Besondere Wege für Radfahrer. Zur Geschichte des Radwegebaus in Deutschland von den Anfängen bis 1940’, unpublished manuscript, 1993; Peter Cox, ‘A Denial of Our Boasted Civilization: Cyclists’ Views on Conflicts over Road Use in Britain, 1926–1935’, \textit{Transfers} 2 (2012): 4–30; Ruth Oldenziel and Adri Albert de la Bruhèze, ‘Contested Spaces: Bicycle Lanes in Urban Europe, 1900–1995’, \textit{Transfers} 1 (2011): 29–49.}

Spending many hours on the road, quite naturally the travellers made frequent comments about the tracks they travelled, as well as about the hardships in ascending (and descending) Europe’s mountainous areas, flat tires and breakdowns, and the difficulties in crossing borders.\footnote{Hermodsson, \textit{Cykelsommar i Europa}, 24, 40; Reinarth, \textit{På cykel genom 16 länder}, 30, 46–8, 214–15. On the problems for cyclists and car drivers crossing borders in Europe before and after 1900, and the attempts to facilitate such passages, see Frank Schipper, \textit{Driving Europe: Building Europe on Roads in the Twentieth Century} (Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2008), 59–68; Oldenziel and Hård, \textit{Consumers, Tinkerers, Rebels}, 139–42.} While celebrating the Danish and even more the Dutch bicycle paths, completely separated from the carriageways, the roads of other nations were seen as comparatively poor from cyclists’ perspective.\footnote{Carlsson, \textit{På cykel genom}, 8–9, 18–20, 25; Jerdén, \textit{Med parisluft i bakslangen}, 31, 51–2.}

Cederberg was alone in explicitly reflecting morally upon the transformation of Swedish roads to the demands of automobility. He viewed what happened to the old country road outside his own home as a form of ‘vandalism’. It was straightened, trees along it were ‘ruthlessly cut down’, and the ‘small idyllic bicycle path’, with its grass-covered middle part between the two wheel tracks, disappeared, all with the aim of improving the conditions for ‘our bullies, the motorists, among which many thought they could neglect us [the cyclists] all the more’.\footnote{Cederberg, \textit{Europa runt på 80 dagar}, 7–8.}

Indeed, Cederberg’s complaint spoke to a larger, widening, cultural split between cyclists and drivers, between car-friendly roadway engineers and the pleasures of pedal-power. Travelling in 1926, Pallin found that French roads were often ‘completely straight, sometimes for a distance of 7–8 km …. It almost became a bit hopeless for a cyclist in the long run’. He added a few days later, ‘we almost couldn’t but despair when we saw how the road stretched dead straight ahead of us, tens of kilometres in the woodiest greenery’.\footnote{Pallin, \textit{En Stockholmsgrabb i Afrika}, 9–10, 16.} Similarly, Reinarth, looking back at his daily journey between Hamburg and Bremen, noted that some stretches had been ‘straight like a ruler’ as far as the eyes could see.\footnote{Reinarth, \textit{På cykel genom 16 länder}, 21.} Unknowingly, Pallin and Reinarth explained that road construction for car traffic made cycling dull and monotonous.

The interwar highway experiments in Italy and Germany gave rise to ambiguous reactions.\footnote{Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{The World Beyond the Windshield: Roads and Landscapes in the United States and Europe}, ed. Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 2. For more details see the individual chapters by Thomas Zeller and Massimo Moraglio in the same book.} Many Swedish travellers expressed fascination with the improved routes in Germany during the interwar period. Yet, at the same time, they tended to have different ideas about why they were built: to create jobs, to integrate the country, or to prepare for war. Some praised the ‘aesthetics’ and rationality of German roads; others found them repetitive and uninteresting.\footnote{Charlotte Tornbjer, ‘Modernity, Technology and Culture in Swedish Travel Reports During the 1930s’, in \textit{Technology in Time, Space, and Mind}, ed. K.G. Hammarlund and Tomas Nilsson (Halmstad: Högskolan i Halmstad, 2008), 106–10.}
discussed whether the new roads meant pleasurable driving or produced boredom. In Jerdén, we find these attitudes combined in one person, but differentiated depending on the mode of travel. As she was picked up by a lorry and left the German country road for the Autobahn, she marvelled:

[W]e turned away from the old country road and onto the Reichsautobahn, on which all through-traffic drives and from which bicyclists are banned. We progressed rapidly. As straight as an arrow the belt of cement made its way through forests and over plains. No villages were passed. No humans whatsoever. From time to time, we met a lorry or a car [but] it was never a matter of close acquaintances, as a grass bank of some meters separated the two roadways. I thought in horror of such a road with neither a beginning nor an end, but from the comfortable driver’s compartment it was nothing but fun to see kilometre after kilometre being consumed by the car.

While magnificent for car use, roads like the Autobahn were unsuitable (and off-limits) for cyclists and this created nationally defined distinctions between cycling cultures and experiences. And while difficult in Germany, in Belgium and the Netherlands Jerdén frequently caught up with other cyclists, exchanged some short phrases, or shared rides for some distance. Such temporary co-travelling was indeed common practice among cyclists, suggesting that cycling was a more sociable practice than car driving, but now enjoying that interaction was evermore defined by the type of roadways on offer.

The way in which auto drivers operated their machines also had implications for cyclists and those behaviours could be both nationally and chronologically contingent. By the interwar period, both Pallin and Hermodsson observed that French roads, once celebrated as the best bicycle venues in the world, were now dangerous for cyclists because of motorists’ reckless driving and constant use of their horn. Hermodsson called it their ‘southern temperamental’ way of driving; Pallin compared French carelessness to a more collaborative Swedish style of driving at instances when a motorist would overtake a bicyclist. ‘It was not like home, where you slowly and safely drive to the side, after first having tried to drive next to the one that wants to overtake you’. Unknowingly, Pallin captured the transformations of the road and the reconfiguration between user groups that had already taken place in France in 1926, but that still had to take place in Sweden.

Neither the roads nor the changing traffic on them were welcoming to cyclists. The transformation of roads to the perceived needs of motorists preceded anything that can be called mass motorisation: in the interwar period cyclists easily outnumbered motorists, but the road networks all over Europe were being fitted for the minority. The hardware of touring and mobility more generally – often an outcome of mediation between state and civil society actors – sped up the reconfiguration between cycling and motoring.

**Conclusion**

In this article I have examined travelogues written by Swedes travelling the European continent by bicycle during the interwar period, with the purpose of understanding the reconfiguration between different modes of mobility during that time. The travellers in question

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109 Hermodsson, Cykelsommar i Europa, 30; Pallin, En Stockholmsgrabb i Afrika, 9–10.
were young people from different social strata, although most were middle class. Almost all of the narrators were in their twenties, travelling for two to three months during their summer vacations from vocational school, university, or in-between different phases of life. Although one or two out of eight were written by authors with literary ambitions, a clear majority were bread-and-butter travel books. Still, their usefulness is clear. Not only do they contain practical information about itineraries and border controls, quality of roads and lodging, what the travellers brought with them and how they managed, the accounts are also detailed with respect to motivations for travel as well as the experiences and sensations of cycling. In short, these travelogues capture users’ experience and details of practices – and in particular an insider’s versions of them – that most other sources do not.

Cycle touring was a very popular leisure activity during the 1920s and 1930s. It was a transnational practice, but was usually domestically oriented. What made some embark on long-distance journeys on the European continent? A few of them cycled because it was affordable and would have opted for other, more comfortable modes of mobility had these been economically viable for them. Most cyclists, however, went by bike because they wanted to, because it suited who they were, or thought they were. These cyclists framed bicycles as ‘adventure machine(s)’, with which they discovered Europe, tinkered, and explored and expressed their personalities – whether as independent spirit or daredevil. While some sought an active, sporty and even strenuous experience, others reckoned cycling the perfect means to get close to nature, to meet fellow travellers and locals – and to find themselves, in body and mind. These cyclists were articulate about their bodily sensations: exhaustion, sore muscles, and the exhilarating feeling of being carried forward by one’s power. Others found cycling a flexible and independent way of getting off the beaten track, even in comparison to going by car. In short, to these cyclists, bicycling rendered a more authentic experience than other modes of travel. These benefits had to be balanced against the careful planning necessary to cope with the constraint of carrying adequate supplies as well as the challenges associated with the slower pace of mobility.

Cycle touring remained popular well into the post-war period, but it faced a constant and growing challenge from the car already in the interwar period, in terms of representation and image (comfort, convenience, speed) rather than numbers of practitioners. The reconfiguration between bicycle and car mobility, at a time when bicycles and cyclists easily outnumbered cars and motorists, was encouraged by the transformation of roadways, made evermore the domain of cars versus bicycles. These changes were a result of mediation between government and civil society actors and were based on projections about the future rather than present-day realities.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Ruth Oldenziel for her support when developing a first draft of this article, and Eric G. E. Zuelow and the *Journal of Tourism History* referees for valuable comments to improve later draft versions.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.
Funding
This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council [grant number 2013-00335].

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