

Riding the City - Gender Dimension of Mobility in Urban Context-

Adina Manta

University of Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

In this paper I tried to understand the way in which the city is experienced by the female cyclist, taking into consideration city-mobility and gender relationships. I was also interested in observing if there is an identity transposition in this practice of mobility, investigating the relationship between the bicycle and the female cyclist. To answer the research question, I conducted 5 unstructured interviews with female cyclists and analyzed answers from a blog dedicated to women who ride bicycles where I managed to better identify which is their perception towards the bicycle. Combining the data obtained from the interviews and the blog with Marc Auge's theory about spaces and non spaces, Michel de Certeau's theory that introduces the "practiced space" concept, I have identified the gender dimension of these spaces trying to go beyond public-private dichotomy, basing my research on the "gendered space" concept. The results of the research have a descriptive character and are not representative for the entire female cyclist population.

Keywords : city • gender • mobility • bicycle

Introduction

From the 18th century until now the bicycle has gone through numerous changes, both technical as well as socio-symbolical. Born from the need of easing mobility, the bicycle appears at the end of the 18th century under the name of *célérifère*, 27 years later after technical enhancements becoming the dresine, and only around the end of the 19th century becoming the modern bicycle ¹. Also, in the 19th century the „Tirul” company rents a few velocipedes to its employees and in 1954, in Zărnești, the first Romanian bicycle “Victoria” ² is produced. Historically speaking, the evolution of the bicycle is

¹ Bicycle history: Before the bike as we know it. Available at <http://www.freerider.ro/mag/istoria-bicicletei-inainte-de-bicicleta-asa-cum-o-stim-27326.html> Accessed at 7.06.2014

² Bicycle history in Romania. Available at <http://www.stopco2.ro/2009/07/07/istoria-bicicletei-in-romania/> Accessed at 7.06.2014

presented mostly from the perspective of technological changes, whereas the socio-symbolical point of view is ignored. By changing the perspective we can say that the functions and meanings of the bicycle get reconfigured through history, moving from means of transportation (18th century) to means of emancipation for women (20th century). As a consequence, in Romania we have Mița Mihăiescu, also known as Mița Biciclista (Mița the Cyclist). A controversial character of those times, Mița the Cyclist becomes an exotic appearance in a society where the public/private – male/female dichotomy is strong, the public space being male dominated. Mița the Cyclist is the first woman that pedalled wearing pants in Bucharest, breaking the social gender norms derived from riding a bicycle, and also through the outfit she chose to wear. I believe that Mița's deviations from the social norms were tolerated by the male dominant society thanks to the fact that she was a male chaperon, this label justifying her behavior to society. But still, in her case the bicycle was a symbol of emancipation, she was a woman that no longer depended on a man to travel in the public space, an independent woman that decided on her own the aspects of her life. A modern figure, Mița was frequently mentioned in the Furnica magazine, thus certifying her mordenity and the curiosity that she arose all around her, thus becoming the attraction of interbelic Bucharest:

„When she would appear on Victoriei Bulevard, the aristocrats from Capsa, the bourgeois from Otetelesanu and the boema of Kubler abandoned politics and svart to admire the lovely bizzare cyclist specimen, whom the kidder Ranetti never missed an opportunity to call Mița the Cyclist. The bicycle with a silver handle belonged to a thin and elegant daughter of Eve, with black curls, silk purple tight pants, with a pinkish blouse that freed fluffy sleeves, with tall boots and white silk headgear, wrapped around in white veil, from which two large needles Madame Butterfly style arose” (Alexandru Predescu, 1990).

Mița's outfit came as opposed to what all the other women were wearing when riding the bicycle, Adrian Silvan Ionescu (2006) describing the image of the female cyclist from the interwar period:

“The ladies have continued to wear fluffy pants, tight under the knee, or a pants-skirt, all the way down to half of the leg; the blouse was white, with gigot sleeves and a tall collar on the neck, and over that a short jacket up to the waist, closed two times and very big

lapels. They had tall boots, with laces, and on the head they would wear a simple hat, with a small peak, on top of a rich coiffure.” (apud, Rotaru, 2013).

Starting with these stories related to the social-symbolic dimension of the bicycle, I intend to understand the way the urban space is experienced by women through bicycles and what are the meanings of this interaction between females and the city, one done through bikes. The bi-dimensional connection between the city and the social actor is highlighted by investigating women cyclists: the space structures exerting an influence over the female cyclist's experience but also the female cyclist exerting a certain influence over the explored spaces. This connection between spatial agency and woman cyclist is my main focus in this paper. Also, I explored the identity aspects of the bicycle and the bond between the female cyclist and the bicycle. The next part of the paper will introduce a short literary journey that is both directly and indirectly related to the subject, and presenting theories from both urban sociology and the feminist paradigm concerning urban mobility.

Literature Review

Space narratives and gender space

Physical space becomes a social space, full of social-cultural meanings resulting from the interaction of individuals with the space as a set of social icons. Michel de Certeau (1984) relates the everyday social practices, such as walking, with active experience of the city and with the transformation of the urban space through this type of experience, thus giving meaning and function to urban furniture elements, resulting into an anthropological, poetic and mythic experience of the space. Space is being crossed by space narratives that function as an organizational element (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93). In this way, narratives about mobility have an essential role in highlighting gender as a social construct (Cresswell, Uteg, 2008). The act of story-telling becomes a channel for understanding the way in which the city is experienced genderwise.

Mobility practices become the ways of experiencing the city and the mode of understanding the way in which the space can construct and deconstruct social relationships. Marc Auge (1995) discusses about “*non-space*” as a product of the super modernity, the main characteristic of this space being the lack of social and personal meanings. A context for new experiences but also for alienation, non-spaces tends to mediate the relationships with the self and with others, non-spaces being defined by the

words and texts through which they communicate with us (e.g.: Instruction for use) (Auge, 1995, p.100). Through experiencing the urban places (highway, parks, airports, streets) labeled as non-spaces they become meaningful spaces created through fleeting and solitary embodiments (Spinnery, 2007). Considering this spaces only as connection points from a point A to a point B, Auge's theory does not take into account the everyday practice as a key concept. Auge (1995) defines the non-space as a place for mobility, known only through texts and signs. In this way, the sight is the main interactional channel with these spaces, the experiencing occurring only individually without a focused social interaction (Auge, 1995, p.100). Spinnery (2007) reviews Auge's theory through the concept of embodiment of social practice. Therefore, riding the bicycle becomes a way of transforming the non-space in lived, experienced and embodied spaces (Spinnery, 2007, p. 29). Mobility does not refer only to geographical space but also to social space focusing on spatial meanings associated with mobility (Crosswell, Uteg, 2008).

Riding the bicycle as a form of mobility becomes the connection between the city and the individual. The embodiment of this mobility practice permits to explore and understand the city from the gender relationship perspective. For a better understanding of this perspective, it is best to move the focus from the individual to the city. In this context, the city is characterized by spatial agency, thus managing the relationships between the participants to everyday life. The streets, parks, highways - all these non-spaces elements become a framework for everyday activities which reflect the social structures existing at the macro level. So, the bicycle becomes an active instrument that permits the embodiment of the city and the transformation of the static, meaningless urban spaces in spaces that are permanently constructed and deconstructed in terms of social and symbolic meanings.

Technology becomes a central element in understanding the connection between mobility and spatial embodiment. Through technology the interaction with the city is facilitated, the experiencing process being given sensory connotations. Analyzing the urban spaces from an embodied perspective and through the technology lens, we can observe the reconfiguration of the non-spaces in meaningful spaces, different types of technologies opening new possibilities for exploration and experience of the same space (Spinnery, 2007). The bicycle becomes the connection between the agent and the context, and through the bicycle the city becomes embodied. Objectifying the bicycle as a

gendered element is realized in close connection with its technology, thus, the universalizing of the diamond bike frame from 1890 is a key element in the transformation of the bicycle into a gendered object (Oddy, 1996, p.61). Men have a more relaxed relationship with technology than women, fixing their bicycles by their own. On the other hand, women's relationship with technology is being mediated by men. (Skinner, Rosen, 2007, p 90). Skinner and Rosen (2007), analyzing the relationship with technology from a gender point of view, concludes that women narratives regarding their technical interactions with their bicycles are reinforcing the stereotype according to which women lack ability when it comes to fixing a technical problem on their bike. On the other hand, men have a more relaxed attitude and conjure "lack of time" as an excuse for not fixing their bikes, avoiding admitting the lack of technical skills (Skinner, Rosen, 2007, p 90).

The "Gender Space" concept has its origins in Michael de Certeau's theory, mobility practices having the role of spatial agents (Burde, Kohn, 2009). According to the authors, in this context, the space agency can be investigated under the form of space seen as narrative and social constructions, space that becomes the framework in which social interactions can change. Another approach for this matter is represented by the question "*Spatial structures shape individuals or individuals shape spatial structures?*" (Burde, Kohn, 2009, p. 59).

The approach used in this paper aims to investigate the question of duality for the relationship between spatial structures and individuals. Also, the main focus of this paper is the gender dimension of mobility. In this note I try to identify if space and urban places create ways of experiencing, or if this ways already exist and they are only replicated in the urban space. How the city is built and conceptualized can reinforce or deconstruct gender differences, breaking the public-private dichotomy. Negotiation and renegotiation of public space by women is achieved through everyday activities such as cycling (McNamara, 2013).

Hidden dimensions of human interaction can be deciphered by studying the city as "*Silent language*", the limited access of women in the urban space perpetuates the gender stratification (Spain, 1993). The metaphor used by Spain (1993) "*the city as a silent language*", even if capturing the agent function of the city, it only reveals one dimension of the investigated social phenomena. On one hand, there is the city as a language but on the other hand, I consider that woman's perceptions about this

“language” should be taken into account. Spain also follows the assumption that there is limited access for women in urban areas, but it is interesting to see how women perceive this, and if from their narratives one can tell that some areas of the city are felt as inaccessible to them. From this perspective, it can emerge that not only gender stratification is perpetuated by the city, but that it is even passed on by women.

Breaking the public-private dichotomy and understanding the city as a complex form of social organization may facilitate the individualized way of experiencing the city. This type of city is an emerging city that does not have a fixed shape, as it is constantly changing, both mobile and territorial, with multiple identities and with no ideal models (*apud*, Cattán, 2008, p. 92). The explored and lived city becomes a mobile city, an individualized city through the meanings assigned by each participant. Also, the concept of “emerging city” highlights the bi-dimensional relationship that exists between the social actor and the city, so, as the actor changes and shapes the city through active experiencing, while the city also has an influence on the actor’s narratives.

The space as an instrument of thinking and acting involves the triangulation of the mental, psychic and social dimension. Understanding the space involves understanding the perceived space of everyday practices (*The mental dimension*), the imaginative representations of space (*The psychic dimension*) and the lived representation that focus on the embodiment of the city (*The social Dimension*) (Lefebvre, 1974/2003).

The mental and psychic dimension may constitute barriers in space experiencing. The way in which the woman or the cyclist perceive the urban space in terms of safety can influence the way in which the social dimension is constructed in their narratives. Fears such as the fear of heavy traffic can become barriers for the woman cyclist in experiencing the non-space or even avoiding it. Stereotypes, heard stories from friends or past experiences do not allow space to be decoded. Also, how the space is built can be another obstacle in exploring the non-spaces.

According to Gillian (1993) in the public-private dichotomy, the private represents femininity and security and the public represents masculinity, danger, thus outlining a "geography of fear" that reinforces the feeling of insecurity. This type of fear is not an individually-created fear but a collective one, culturally built and resulting from gender roles associated with spatiality (Massey *et all.* 1993, p71). The demystification of the space through crossing social constructed barriers is achieved by using the space in

the daily social routine, so in this way the mental map is not filled with indirect illustrations of the space and the myth of danger can be erased permitting women to explore the public space with no restrictions (Gillian, 1993). I consider that only through experiencing the urban space the gender stereotypes can be deconstructed.

Leaving behind the classical approach of mobility, which focuses on the dichotomies local-global, here-there, private-public, there is a need to define spatial objects conceptualized in terms of hybrid dimension, body representing a key element in the new approach of space and place. It is also seeking to identify spatial and local identities as multiple and not reducible to a single model (Cresswell, Uteng, 2008, pp. 92). Mobility decisions (choosing to ride the bus, the bicycle, or the subway etc.) have an important role in defining one's identity by interacting with other life aspects like age, gender or occupation (Skinner, Rosen, 2007). Therefore, integrating the concept of identity in understanding mobility practices represents one of the central questions of this paper and creates an intersectional context for analysis.

Identity in mobility practices

Introducing the concept of identity takes the paper from a rational choice model to a more complex model of analysis, one focused on cultural aspects. Assuming that the bicycle can become an extension of an individual's identity: Why that kind of bike is chosen? Why choose that color? Why do they accessorize them? What they wear while riding their bikes? All these are questions about the identity of the woman cyclist, and help in the better understanding of how cycling is experienced.

Skinner and Rosen (2007) identify 3 identity models in the matter of mobility. On the one hand, identity can be seen as a pre-existing element forming and determining the behavior. On the other hand there is the model that addresses an integrative perspective, transport and identity being a part of a circular process in which the social dimension and identity influence and are influenced by transportation experiences (Skinner, Rosen, 2007, p. 86).

Methodology

Research design

In order to gather my information I conducted 5 interviews with women aged between 23 and 30 years old, with a minimum of a-two-year experience in riding bicycles in the

urban space of Bucharest. The last interview was conducted with a couple of cyclists and beside their narratives regarding the mobility practices, I was interested in the way they interacted with each other and how each of them responded to the same question. The male perspective was very interesting, especially because it was in contrast with the female's narratives. From his stories, one could tell how the spatial fears of his partner were reiterated.

The respondents are participants to Skirt Bike manifestations, which promotes wearing chic outfits while ridding the bike. Women outfits turned out to be a key element in developing the feminine perspective of this social practice, the bicycle becoming a gendered object. Besides the 5 interviews, I conducted a content analysis on the Skirt Bike blog, interpreting the answers to the question "What does the bike represent to you?".

Research Questions

- 1) How is Bucharest city experienced by women cyclist?
- 2) Does the bicycle become an extension of the woman cyclist's identity?
- 3) Which is the relationship between city- bike and mobility?

Results

Doing city

The mobility practices intermediate the transformation of non-space into space. Riding the bicycle is the active experiencing of the city spaces, spaces named by Marc Auge (1995) as being non-spaces because of the lack of personal meanings given by individuals. The sensorial experiencing of the spaces gives birth to a process of giving meanings to the space travelled, meanings that are in direct relation with the bicycle experience: "*As often as you travel on a certain itinerary, you know where the easy slopes are, or where you have to pedal harder because there's a hill, you know these parts(..) You feel less in danger but that's the part that you enjoy, you feel very free*" (Blog, 31).

For women, cycling is not just a simple way of getting around, this type of mobility becomes part of a process of personal development, breaking gender norms and conquering the city: "*When I am on my bike I feel free, I feel that the city is mine*" (Velvet, 30 ani). Starting from the classic dichotomy, public/private, where the private is associated with feminine, safety, and public is masculinity, danger, the bicycle mobility

takes women out of the private space, allowing access to public space. The need for safety and fear of traffic, fear of danger, of risks, are often assured by urban spaces that are specially designed for riding a bicycle, like parks, for instance. According to Marc Auge, the park is a non space, the only type of interaction being visual. Through the bicycle, the park becomes alive and actively experienced. In this case, the park experienced through the bicycle determines certain emotions to the female cyclist, like freedom and joy. From this point of view, I believe there is an indirect relationship of giving meanings, because at first sight, from the stories of the female cyclists, there is no meaning given to the park, being just the context where she gives meanings to riding the bike. But it is because the bi-dimensional relationship between riding the bicycle and context. The context is associated with safety and this permits to achieve feelings like freedom or joy. In this way, the meanings are attributed indirectly: *"I have honestly been hundreds of times there, it's my park, I go there since the 7th grade, I know all the roads, alleys, corners, I know how the sun rises. There is a small slope I can take with my bike, next to a bridge over the lake, I always take this slope near the lake. And there's a road, up near the lake, it's the segment, first trees and then it goes down the valley, then there's the lake and it's awesome. It gives me a freedom feeling that only there I can obtain."* (MTB, 23).

This experiencing process is mediated by body mobility and the perceptive memories. (Degen, Gillian, 2012). Therefore, the type of technology chosen in performing the daily mobility influences the sensorial experimentation. Another element that follows in this analysis of space- sensorial- mobility is technology. From this angle, the bike is the connection element between space mobility and sensorial experiences, becoming a space exploration instrument. Spinnery (2007), after doing a research on cyclists, states that hearing and sight react to the body's position, because of different geometries of the bicycles. Furthermore, technology eases and influences the way the city is perceived and experienced. The image you create relating to a certain place, space or even city, is mediated by the type of technology used for exploring them. The city appears differently from inside a car, from a bike or a motorcycle. The car allows sight to be the sense that prevails in this mobility experience while the bicycle or motorcycle, through the way they are built, involve more actively all the senses. Technology mediates visual representation of the city, this suggesting the importance of the sensorial in acknowledging and deciphering certain spaces, the same place or street being differently represented visually by the same person according to the mobility

practice. Therewith, it is noticeable that the sensorial involvement determines a much more intense space experience and ownership (“My park”, “My road”).

Despite all these, the parks are artificially created contexts for experiencing certain leisure activities, while the streets become complex frames of analysis of the everyday activities. Extrapolating to the public-private dichotomy, I consider the private space as being represented by spaces that have been built to create a proper context for activities that imply the feeling of safety or relaxation and to separate them from the rest of the day to day activities, such as the parks. On the other hand the streets and the roads are public spaces associated with risk, masculinity and fear. Women riding bikes in this context, becomes a suggestive illustration of the gender dimension in the urban. So, does the city create ways of experiencing space structures or does the individual change these structures by acts of mobility?

The city is perceived as a place full of danger, especially for a woman. *“As a girl, you’re scared to walk alone on the street”* (Velvet, 30). Starting from Lefebvre’s theory (1974/2003) where space is perceived as a kind of thinking and acting instrument, we can identify in the stories of the female cyclists the mental as well as the psychological dimension of the space. In this case, the imaginative representations of the space becoming barriers in its exploration:

“Girls are easily scared. I have friends that ride bikes themselves, but some say that you have nowhere to ride through this Bucharest traffic. They’re scared of cars, comments from the drivers. At first they’re malicious because you’re a cyclist, then because you’re a woman. There’s this sort of discrimination of female cyclists, because of the stereotype that women drive lousy therefore they must ride bikes badly as well.” (Ariel, 27).

From this point, the city is the one who shapes the relationship with spaces and the ways of exploring, Bucharest being pictured as a hostile city for the female cyclist, one that does not offer through its infrastructure the necessary comfort to explore and live it. In exchange, the moment this “mental map of fear (Gillian, 1993)” is deconstructed by taking risks and coming out in traffic, the power balance is changed, the female cyclists being the one shaping the city:

“ Nothing up to then made my heart beat so hard as passing a large intersection in rush hour. The experience of pedaling in traffic has equaled with a sensation avalanche, from trust, emotion, alert and liberation, pure joy that has slowly made

me addicted. I realized it was for the first time when I managed to leave a comfort zone, defying all the limits I have set before.” (Velvet, 30).

From this female cyclist’s narrative we can identify embodiment elements of the bike in the city (“*Nothing up to then made my heart beat so hard*”), this non-space becoming a lived and embodied one, defining itself in the third dimension as well, the one Lefebvre identified as the social dimension of the lived representations. At the same time, the shaping process is not directed only by the experiencing of the city but also towards the female cyclist. The relation between the city and the female cyclist becomes a bi-dimensional one, where riding a bicycle through the city deconstructs the geography of fear, but in the same time has an important role in the personal identity process („*defying all the limits I have set before.*”).

The Paradox of the female cyclist’s perception is in the fact that on one hand, it is seen as an element that offers safety and keeps them away from the city dangers (“*Frankly, you’re a lot safer in the evening than waking, because if somebody were to pick on you, you just hop on the bike. I haven’t had such issues up to now. I’m on my bike and nobody bothers me, you’re happier, you have ownership on what’s going on. It gives me a feeling of safety, I’m way more safe on my bicycle*” Ariel, 27) and on the other hand, the bicycle is perceived as offering more exposure and vulnerability in traffic, rising the awareness in terms of physical safety („*when I come out on the street I have to be carefull to all the cars, how that guy opens a door, how the other passes me by, there’s a crossing and there’s 3 kids left, all these things*” (MTB, 23). I believe that this paradox results from the dual perception of risk. If in the first instance the bicycle offers protection against human factors, in the second the risk is the traffic itself.

Bicycle as a gendered object – Femininity on two wheels

The bicycle genderisation is done strictly in relation to its technology (Oddy, 1996, p.61). Therefore, the approach of this mobility practice is influenced also by the bicycle’s technology. In this research I focused on women ridding city-bikes. From a tehnological perspective, this kind of bike - through it’s frame facilitates - allows women to wear dresses or skirts. Choosing this kind of bicycle, in the case of my respondents, depended on variables such as their profession, the bike being a means of transport from home to job, but also because of identity reasons. In this case, the bicycle’s technology allows them to wear a chic and feminine outfit on the bike (Picture 1).

This type of bicycle was adopted by the Cycle Chic movement, members of this movement changing aspects of their life in terms of behaviours. In terms of Actor Network Theory, the bicycle can be seen as a non human actor (Ignacio, Thomas, 2010). The changes the non human actor (the bicycle) applies to the network, in this case, relate to identity issues. The bike itself becomes an identity image that one as owner adapts to, in terms of appearance and behaviour:

“Since I got Scarlet I changed my clothing step by step .I became brave and I quit the rigid office clothes that were anyway not suitable for my new bike” (Scarlet, 30).

In this respondent’s case, the bicycle becomes a visual symbol of femininity, through accessories such as the front basket and the horn, but also through colour. The mobility practice in this case does not relate only to passing through a space but it also indicated the transformation of the gender dimension of the space. Riding a feminine bicycle wearing a skirt or a dress becomes a statement of retrieving femininity in the urban space.



Picture 1- Cycle chic¹

¹ Available at https://www.facebook.com/SkirtBike/photos_stream Accessed at 17 August 2014

After gathering the data, I have identified in the narratives of the female cyclists the identity analysis model that Skinner and Rosen (2007) proposed. Therefore, the relation between mobility and identity is built on the fact that the means of transportation and identity are part of a circular process where they influence each other. Further, I will present elements of identity discovered in the stories of the female cyclists I have interviewed and also in the answers on the Skirt Bike blog.

The name of the bicycle

The bicycle is no longer a simple way of transportation. A tight bond is born between the bike and the female cyclist. This relation is determined and strengthened continuously because of the experiences accessed through the bicycle by the cyclist.

Giving a name to the bike is an indicator of the strong relationship established between female cyclist and their bikes. The personalization of the bike not only with accessories but also by giving it a name indicates the step from just a form of transport to a subjective and emotional level that is more pronounced: *“My bike’s name is Ariel. I love the turquoise color, I’m a redhead and my favorite cartoon is Little Mermaid, so, well, her tail is blue, turquois, her red hair and we’re both a whole so we round up this character”* (Ariel, 27) (Picture 2), *“Meanwhile, Scarlett timidly backed off, once space shortage occurred, making room for my new city bike, the colorful Velvet, that has made my dusty streets urban rides so smooth that they suggested her name. And in the urban journey breaks, in the weekend, I gather with the help of my mountain bike Kaila, new stories from mountain paths or from over the hills, with people, feelings, new places, and we’re happy together”* (Velvet, 30) (Picture 3).



Picture 2¹- Ariel the bike

¹ Available at https://www.facebook.com/SkirtBike/photos_stream Accessed at 17 August 2014



Picture 3- Scarlet Bike ¹

Outfit and feminization of a mobility practice

Riding the bicycle is associated with the loss of femininity and embracing a sport, masculine outfit. The cycle-chic movement promotes the chic riding on the bicycle amongst women. Transposing the identity elements in this type of mobility practice is done also through outfit:

„I think that if you ride a bike, it doesn't mean that you have to give up your femininity. (...)I wouldn't give that up and the way I like to dress most of the time” (Ariel, 27), „And to those who question the compatibility between bike and heels, I say it's easier to pedall than to just walk on them” (Velvet, 30).

Considering all these, the female cyclist's narratives revealed the fact that this type of outfit is seen as a curiosity, being considered abnormal *„People see you a bit weird. Some have an admiring look, but most of them just think hey, you're on a bike, how can you dress like that ? I feel comfortable, I have no problem.”*(Blog, 26). The gendering of the bike makes this means of transportation mostly associated with sports and masculinity (Picture 4).

¹ Available at https://www.facebook.com/SkirtBike/photos_stream Accessed at 17 August 2014



Picture 4- Girl bike vs Boy Bike¹

Wearing a skirt on a bike is perceived as strange, and adopting this outfit in public, masculine spaces, like the roads, makes the bicycle become a way of demanding the city's space femininity. Like the case of Mița the Cyclist, the outfit becomes an element that is looked at as being unusual, but the paradox is that in the interwar period a woman in tight pants on a bike meant a turnaround of the norms, and in the case of the female cyclists I have interviewed in this research, the woman wearing a skirt becomes the deviation from the norms. I believe that a possible explanation may be in the socio-symbolical value of the bicycle. The city cannot be labeled as a masculine or feminine space because the city is composed out of spaces and places that are differently experienced by the participants in its life. From this point of view, the space is individualized getting new meanings from different social actors. The borders between public and private are no longer there, these being influenced by the meanings given by each actor in particular and the way of exploring and experiencing these spaces. The city is no longer seen as something inert, static, it is a mobile city ("Emerging city") with a lot of identities, in which each urban element ends up constructed and deconstructed by the social actors through their social practices in the urban space.

The urban space becomes a gendered space, in which the space structures are negotiated continuously from the gender dimension perspective. Starting from this assumption, the roads become strongly masculine spaced associated with risk, fear and

¹ First Bike Available at <http://lovelybike.blogspot.ro/2010/10/closer-look-at-italian-city-bicycles.html>
 Second Bike Available at <http://www.findnaturewallpapers.com/mountain-bike-picture-1555.html>
 Accessed on 17 August 2014

danger, where the appearance of women in a dress on a bike becomes a curiosity, being labeled as peculiar. This reaction confirms that certain urban spaces and social practices are perceived as masculine.

For Low (2002), the space represents a plurality of spaces. Following Low's theory, space cannot be represented as a single space, with the same meanings for everybody. The space is constructed from places, experiences, technologies and social practices that permanently reconfigure the individual's image about spatiality. Urban places are not defined by their land-marks but by the social practices that are associated with them (Farias, Bneder, 2010). Through sensorial experimentation, meanings and mental images are constructed, images that are reflected in the individual behaviors and performance.

Conclusions

In this research I tried to capture the gender dimension of the urban space, basing it on understanding the way the city is experienced and explored by bicycle. Following the understanding of the city-gender-mobility relation, the paper reveals the concept of gendered space, a space where the representations of gender are built and deconstructed by social actors. Therefore, the roads are considered masculine spaces thanks to the attributes given, extracted from the narratives of the female cyclists. The road is associated with danger, risk, fear while the park, although it is part of the same symbolic public space, is associated with safety, becoming a rather feminine space. Using the classic public-private dichotomy from the gender dimension perspective, one can observe certain symbolical refinements related to the way of experiencing of giving meaning to spaces you interact with. Just like Marc Auge defines as non space all the spaces that belong to the public sphere, ignoring from his analysis the concept of meanings given by the social actors, the city is no longer a simple developmental context for daily activities, but it becomes an emerging city with multiple identities, in a continuous symbolical transformation, being built and socially deconstructed by their social interaction. The embodied experience of cycling reveals the relation between the social actor and the urban space and how each of them has an influence on each other. This connection between the social actor and the space is intermediated by technology, in this case by the bicycle. Also, approaching the cyclist phenomena in Bucharest from a gender perspective the paper identified another type of discrimination in the public

space, the discrimination of women cyclists in a masculine space such as the Bucharest streets.

For women, cycling is a type of mobility that becomes part of a process of personal development, breaking gender norms and conquering the city. From the interviews I could identify the bicycle as a mobility practice that takes women out of the private space, allowing access to public space. Through the bicycle the barrier between private space and public space is passed, women claiming public space through this type of mobility. This paper illustrates the bicycle as a visual symbol of femininity. Riding a bicycle becomes an indicator of the transformation of the gender dimension of the space and a statement of retrieving femininity in the urban space. Analyzing urban space and mobility practices through a gender lens I could identify how the gender dimension is created in the urban space through day to day activities such as riding a bicycle.

The current research is a strictly exploratory one that allowed me to taste a bit of the wide universe of gender dimension in the mobility practices from the urban space. I do not believe it is complete but I consider it a generator for empirical development directions I wish to pursue in the future. Still, through this paper, I could identify certain study coordinates of this phenomenon that will be followed up. As for the future research issues, I believe in giving a special attention to the way the city, through its nature, builds gender stereotypes or fuels already existent ones. It is not about the female cyclist's discrimination, but about the cyclist's discrimination generally speaking. Bucharest is not a bike friendly city, the lack of bike lanes, the too high sidewalk borders, or the attitude of the other traffic participants being indicators of this. Unlike other strongly developed cities, bike wise, (like Amsterdam, Berlin etc.), Bucharest, due to the lack of this infrastructure, creates a strong fear feeling, on which the mental map of the space is built. Fear that comes from traffic conditions but also from lack of parking spaces for bikes, fear of getting your bike stolen, these findings coming out from all the interviews. All the impediments take an even more pronounced shape in the female cyclist's speeches, becoming barriers of public space exploration. I chose to analyze this phenomenon from the gender dimension perspective because I believe that any type of discrimination becomes even more sensitive when the gender variable is introduced. The gendered dimension of the city and the mobility practices must be studied from the intersectionality perspective, following the way the variables like profession or ethnics influence the mobility practices used in exploring of the city.

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**Appendix 1- Age, occupation and the most attended routs by women interviewed
 in this research**

Name	Age	Occupation	Most attended routs
Ariel	27	Account Manager	Unirii Square- Iancului Road
Velvet	30	Lawyer	Stefan cel Mare Road – Iancului Road- Victoriei Square
MTB	23	Student	Tineretului Park
Scarlet	30	PR	Cotroceni- Iuliu Maniu Boulevard

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