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Original article

Bicycle critical mass events 30 years on – are they an urban mobility movement or a bicycle festival?

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ABSTRACT

The issue of inequality in the use of urban transport space is particularly important in today's car-saturated cities. Increasing the convenience, safety and respect for the rights of vulnerable road users, including in particular pedestrians and cyclists, is emerging as a particular challenge. Grassroots initiatives of city residents, who become cycling advocates and cycling activists, are confronting this problem. Among various forms of activism there is also the organisation of 'critical masses', which were originally intended to remind us about the rights of this group of road users through a simultaneous passage of multiple cyclists through the streets of the city. From the late 20th century to the present day, such events have undergone change. The aim of this study was to investigate how today's critical masses differ from their 1990s prototypes. The research analysed bike critical masses organised in Poland, a country with an underdeveloped cycling culture and low cycling modal share. At one such event, a survey was also conducted to determine why participants chose to attend. The study confirmed that contemporary bicycle critical masses are recreational events promoting cycling.

KEY WORDS: bicycle, cycling policy, bicycle activist, biketivism, bicycle critical mass

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1. Introduction

Active mobility (primarily cycling and walking) is becoming an increasingly popular and desirable practice for daily movement in urban spaces (PISONI ET AL., 2022). This is due to the need to move towards forms of transport that are less polluting and have a positive impact on the health of the population (KOSZOWSKI ET AL., 2018). Modern cities, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, have been dominated by motorised transport (RADZIMSKI & GADZIŃSKI, 2019), which is particularly disruptive to the urban environment. Therefore, active mobility can be an appropriate and effective alternative for counteracting urban transport problems. Increasing the share of walking and cycling in the modal split of urban transport enables cities to shift towards sustainable urban transport and improved environmental quality (SCHNEIDER, 2013). However, the development of these forms of mobility requires proper technical and social preparation. Equality, equal treatment, and universal culture among road users are, alongside a properly prepared infrastructure, extremely important issues for the functioning of transport systems. The structure of the modes of transport is particularly marked by the dominant and increasing number of cars (RIGAL, 2021). This, in turn, increases the risk to people's health and lives during accidents and collisions. Particularly noteworthy in this respect are the interactions between vehicle drivers and pedestrians,

cyclists, and users of other forms of micro-mobility, who are referred to as vulnerable road users (Olszewski et al., 2019; Sahandifar et al., 2022). An accident or traffic incident in such an interaction puts the cyclist in a weaker position relative to the driver (Apasnore et al., 2017) and is more severe for the cyclist (Yannis et al., 2020). The underdeveloped transport space of modern cities, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, creates conflicts between different traffic participants forced to use the same infrastructure. The problem of urban transport imbalances, combined with a lack of political will for change and a lack of institutional solutions, is fostering the emergence of social initiatives aimed at restoring this balance. These activities also serve as a reminder of the equal rights of all road users. Various forms of activism, including "biketivism", play a significant role here (Furness, 2005). Various grassroots initiatives, including critical masses organised since the 1990s to remind us about the presence and rights of cyclists on the road (Blickstein & Hanson, 2001) tackle the described problems. The tradition of organising critical masses has survived until modern times, but over the years their formula has changed towards family events aimed at celebrating cycling. These transformations invite us to reflect on the preservation of the original principles of these events and to verify how much of these assumptions remain in them today.

The aim of this paper is to show how contemporary bicycle critical masses differ from those organised according to their original concept. In order to achieve the aim, the author set out two research tasks: (1) to compare the main features of these events over the years, and (2) to assess the motivations of the participants behind engaging in the contemporary critical mass. The Zagłębie Critical Mass, organised annually in the cities of the Upper Silesian Metropolis in Poland – a country with a low share of cycling in transport – was taken as an example of a contemporary critical mass. This research sought to indicate whether the original idea of a critical mass is still relevant to its participants. The article presents contemporary forms of critical masses and the attitudes of their participants in the broader context of hitherto known principles of such events. This aspect is particularly important in countries with an underdeveloped cycling culture (including Poland), where the social impulse is of key importance in the transition to sustainable forms of mobility.

2. Theoretical background

Just as building infrastructure, the social aspect also undoubtedly has an important impact on increasing cycling in cities (Piatkowski & Bopp, 2021). The previously mentioned social activists use various events, and campaigns try to remind us, particularly car drivers, that a cyclist is a fully-fledged participant of road traffic with his/her rights and duties. Cycling activism ("biketivism") was born out of the need to fight for equality in urban transport (Kwiatkowski & Karbowiński, 2023) and to increase the share of sustainable forms of transport (Horton, 2006). In addition to the aspect of transport equity and the improvement of the urban environment, another important argument is the improvement of the health of urban residents through the use of the bicycle as a means of active mobility (Oja et al., 2011; Gotschi et al., 2016). Individuals or community organisations working on cycling issues have taken up the challenge of leading the fight to secure equal rights for cyclists in urban transport spaces (Leyendecker & Cox, 2022), particularly in the context of reducing the widespread dominance of cars (Aldred, 2013; Roberts, 2020). Their activities also aim to create a civil society that is aware of its rights and enforces them against municipal authorities (Balkmar, 2020). The primary form of activity of cycling activists is to put pressure on local authorities to undertake or increase investment and social measures dedicated to cyclists (Gamble, 2017). Cycling activism has been successful around the world in exerting bottom-up pressure on local authorities, shaping urban cycling policy in Sweden (Balkmar & Summerton, 2017), Spain (Fernandez-Heredia & Fernandez-Sanchez, 2020), and Brazil (Duarte et al., 2014), among other countries. The consolidation of cycling in countries considered to be exemplary in their cycling policies, such as the Netherlands, is also pointed to as a merit and a consequence of the effective action of cycling activists (Bruno et al., 2021; Dekker, 2022). "Biketivism" is also present in the central and eastern, post-socialist part of Europe, where it has also been successful (Udvarhelyi, 2009; Kopf, 2015; Mrkajić & Anguelovski, 2016).

The tools of cycling activists include street happenings, pickets, protests, but also constant pressure on officials and decision makers. The development of the Internet and social media, which has become a tool for publicising cycling issues, is also not without significance (Sunio et al., 2021). Activists' actions tend to be expressive (Sosa Lopez,

2021) but also confrontational, so that activists are often accused of radicalism (BATTERBURY, 2016). One of the more spectacular activities of cycling activists are critical masses consisting of the simultaneous passage of a large column of cyclists through the streets of the city. This form of "biketivism" fits with the tenets of guerilla and tactical urbanism, in which the actions of social activists visibly, albeit temporarily, affect the functioning of the city (SILVA, 2016; HOU, 2020). Temporary solutions introduced by activist groups show how the city functions in an unusual and unexpected situation and give room for discussing permanent transformations in space (WEBB, 2018). The potential of such activities can be utilised in many aspects, including planning future effective cycling infrastructure projects (MARSHALL ET AL., 2016), or changing the transport habits and behaviours of urban residents (NELLO-DAEKIN, 2022). The phenomenon of the bicycle critical mass was born in the 1990s as a protest against the unequal treatment of cyclists on the road, the unfair distribution of urban transport space (STEHLIN & TARR, 2017) and from the need to change the image of the cyclist (STEHLIN, 2015). As LUHTAKALLIO (2018) points out, a simultaneous passage can make cyclists more visible, and their demands begin to be widely and seriously discussed by decision-makers. The first happenings of this kind took place in the 1990s in the USA. In the following years, they also spread to other cities and other countries. They aimed to emphasise that the cyclist is a fully-fledged road user who deserves the same rights and respect as other road users. Due to their form, and the agenda of speaking out against the dominant group on the road – car drivers, the first critical masses could be perceived as confrontational. In their original version, they took on the role, in a sense, of fighting for an equal right to use urban space (STEHLIN, 2019). Nowadays, critical masses are mainly talked about in the context of the formation of a subculture of cyclists and the joyful celebration of cycling (WILLIAMS, 2018).

3. Research methods

In order to fulfil the aim and research objectives set out in the article, the research was carried out in three stages (Fig. 1). Firstly, the collected literature related to critical masses was reviewed in order to generate a set of the most important characteristics of this type of events. Secondly, an analysis of the organised critical masses of cyclists in Poland in 2022 was performed. The third stage considered the results of a survey carried out among the participants of one of the critical masses organised in Poland.

The first stage of the work included a review of literature thematically related to critical masses. On the basis of the work published so far, a number of features were determined, which formed the starting point for the analysis carried out in the subsequent stage of the work. The second stage focused on the critical masses that took place in the largest Polish cities (with a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants) in 2022. Through the websites of the organisers of these events, the author checked, how many times, and on what dates, the rides took place. The third stage involved the analysis of the results of a survey addressed to people participating in one of the critical masses organised in Poland.

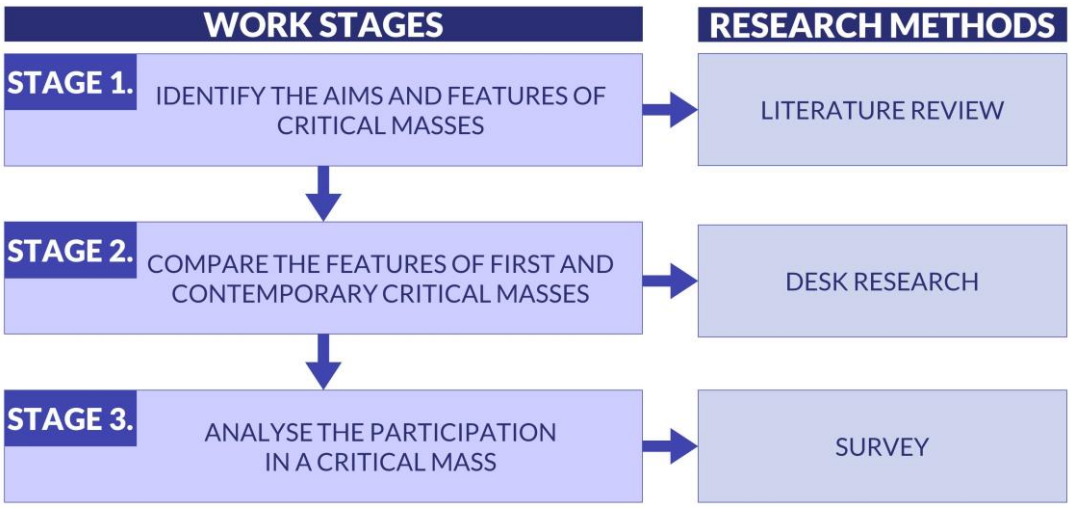


Fig. 1. Work stages (Source: author's own elaboration)

The survey was conducted in a two-track format – CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) and CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview). The first form was based on the operation of a single interviewer who, using an electronic survey form, collected responses during a live interview with respondents just before the start of the mass ride. The second form was an electronic survey posted on the event's social media page after the event. The survey collected 197 complete responses from participants in the critical mass.

The form consisted of 10 questions, including demographics and the substantial section. Among the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents procured by the survey were: gender, age, place of residence, purpose of their daily cycling (respondents were asked to express the ratio of recreational cycling to transport cycling as a percentage), period of cycling during the year (months). Respondents also indicated which critical mass it would be for them and with whom they came. In the main part of the survey, respondents were asked about their purpose in participating in the critical mass, why they decided to participate in the event this year, and whether they were familiar with the original idea of the bicycle critical mass. In the CAPI survey, people who claimed to be familiar with the idea of critical mass were also asked to explain it. The collected results of the survey were cross-tabulated and are presented in graphs in the results section.

4. Results

The results are presented in the subsections corresponding to each stage of the research. Firstly, the objectives and characteristics of the first critical masses were analysed, then the critical masses organised in Poland in 2022 were assessed from this point of view. The final stage tackled the results of the survey conducted at one such event.

4.1. Objectives and features of the first critical masses

As mentioned earlier – the first critical masses took place in San Francisco in 1992 (BLICKSTEIN, 2008). Their seemingly spontaneous and 'random' (PUCHER ET AL., 1999) nature was linked to strictly established rules. On the basis of information gathered in the literature, it is possible to delineate a number of principles that applied during the first critical masses (BLICKSTEIN, 2008; BLICKSTEIN & HANSON, 2001; PUCHER ET AL., 2011):

- held periodically – every month,
- held on Fridays,
- organised in a spontaneous manner,
- did not have a planned route,
- took place without the participation and support of municipal and law enforcement services.

In the following part of the article, it was verified, whether the contemporarily organised critical masses of cyclists still fulfil the designated principles. It was checked whether the features, verifiable within the desk study research method, can be applied to the critical masses organised in Poland in 2022.

4.2. Critical masses organised in Poland

Since the 1990s, bicycle critical masses have also been organised in Poland. Table 1 summarises such events run in the largest Polish cities (with over 100,000 inhabitants). Information in this respect was collected based on media and social-media information disseminated by the organisers of critical masses. The analysis took into account the day of the week, the start time, the organisers, the cyclical nature of the event, and the public communication of the route. The selected features allowed the author to verify whether the contemporary critical masses in Poland correspond in their features to the original assumptions of such events. However, the analysis only included those events whose name indicated that they were critical masses. Therefore, events described as rides, rallies, cycle tours, or using other names unrelated to the idea of critical mass were not taken into account.

The analysis of critical mass events organised in 38 of the biggest Polish cities showed that in 2022 such a ride took place at least once in 17 cities. In the remaining localities, either no such events had ever been organised or they had been discontinued. Considering the day of the week on which the masses took place, it was most often Friday, which is in line with the original idea of a critical mass. In some cities, including Toruń, Szczecin, Gorzów Wielkopolski and Sosnowiec, the organizers planned the events for non-working days – Saturdays, Sundays, and national holidays (Table 1). Kielce also stood out in this respect, as its critical mass events were held on Wednesdays. The choice of day of the week also determined the starting time – mostly after 6 p.m. on weekdays, and after 3/4 p.m. on holidays. In all the analysed events, the entities responsible for the organisation were NGOs, mostly with a cycling profile.

Table 1. Critical mass events organised in Polish cities with over 100,000 inhabitants in 2022 (Source: Author's own elaboration based on Internet sources)

City	Day of the week	Start time	Organiser	Regularity of the event	Publicising the route
Białystok	Friday		cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Bielsko-Biała	no information / not organised in 2022				
Bydgoszcz	Friday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Bytom	Friday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Chorzów	no information				
Częstochowa	Friday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Dąbrowa Górnicza	no information / not organised in 2022				
Elbląg	no information / not organised in 2022				
Gdańsk	no information / not organised in 2022				
Gdynia	no information / not organised in 2022				
Gliwice	Thursday	18:00	cycling NGO	once a year	yes
Gorzów Wielkopolski	Saturday / Sunday	various afternoon hours	cycling NGO	four times a year	yes
Kalisz	no information / not organised in 2022				
Katowice	name change - no longer a critical mass				
Kielce	Wednesday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Wednesday of the month	yes
Koszalin	no information / masses are not organised				
Kraków	organisation discontinued				
Lublin	Friday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Łódź	Friday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Olsztyn	no information / not organised in 2022				
Opole	Friday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Płock	no information / not organised in 2022				
Poznań	organisation discontinued				
Radom	organisation discontinued				
Ruda Śląska	organisation discontinued				
Rybnik	no information / not organised in 2022				
Rzeszów	Friday / Saturday	various afternoon hours	cycling NGO	seven times a year	yes
Sosnowiec	3 May (public holiday)	15:00	cycling NGO	once a year	yes
Szczecin	Saturday	16:00	climate-related NGO	once a year	yes
Tarnów	organisation discontinued				
Toruń	Saturday	16:00	cycling NGO	five times a year	yes
Tychy	organisation discontinued				
Wałbrzych	organisation discontinued				
Warsaw	Friday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Włocławek	organisation discontinued				
Wrocław	Friday	18:00	cycling NGO	every last Friday of the month	yes
Zabrze	organisation discontinued				
Zielona Góra	Friday	20:00	cycling NGO	twice a year	yes

In one case – in Szczecin – it was a climate change organisation. Most differences between the cities were observed in the frequency of the events. In nine of them, they were organised on a monthly basis (according to their original design), while in the remaining ones several times a year, or once a year. A common feature of all the analysed critical masses was the public announcement of the route of the cyclists, which is contrary to the idea of the mass, but is required when organising a mass event. During this type of event, the safety of participants is also ensured by the municipal and law enforcement services. A comparison of the characteristics of the first critical masses with those organised today in Poland is shown in Table 2.

Some of the functioning critical masses were transformed and renamed over time. Such a situation was observed, e.g., in Katowice, where a simultaneous passage of a large group of cyclists is referred to as the "Silesian Cyclist's Day". There are also other cycling rides in numerous cities; however, their name does not refer to the idea of a critical mass. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, these types of events were not considered in the analysis.

Table 2. Features of the first bicycle critical masses and bicycle critical masses organised in Poland in 2022 (Source: Author's own elaboration based on Internet sources)

First critical masses	Contemporary critical masses organised in Poland (2022)
Held periodically – every month	Held periodically in different cities, but at different times, often not all year round
Held on Fridays	Held in different cities on different days, most often on Fridays
Organised in a spontaneous manner	Planned and organised events
Did not have a planned route	Have a planned, publicised route
Took place without the participation and support of municipal services	Take place with the participation of municipal and law enforcement services

4.3. Goals of participation in critical mass events

In order to find out what factors influence the participation of cyclists in a critical mass event, a survey was carried out during one such event in Poland. It was the Zagłębie Critical Mass, which takes place once a year in a polycentric urban region in southern Poland, referred to as the Upper Silesian and Zagłębie Metropolis, which lies at the intersection of two regions – Upper Silesia and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie. The area is home to more than 2 million people. The route of the critical mass usually passes through the cities of the latter region (e.g., Dąbrowa Górnicza, Sosnowiec, Będzin, Czeladź); however, for reasons of spatial cohesion, the event is also attended by the inhabitants of Upper Silesian cities (e.g., Katowice, Chorzów, Ruda Śląska). The event has been organised 15 times since 2008 – annually with a break forced by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic in the years 2020–2021. Due to the large population of the urban region in question, the Zagłębie Critical Mass gathers between 2,000 and 5,000 participants every year. The 2022 version of this campaign was held on 3 May, the National Constitution Day, a statutory holiday in Poland. The route of the ride covered 3 cities – Sosnowiec, Będzin and Czeladź, encouraging just under 3,000 cyclists to participate. The tradition of this event is a meal at the end of the route and a prize draw – in the year of the survey, the winner of the draw received a bicycle.

The respondents to the survey were predominantly male (62.4%), while the average age of the respondents was 41 (Table 3). More than one third of those surveyed use the bicycle only for recreational purposes, while 61.4% of respondents use it for both recreational and transport (transport) purposes, of which 39.6% used it for recreational purposes over transport purposes, for 14.7% they are pursued equally, and for 7.1% the bicycle is more a means of transport than a recreational tool. The seasonality of cycling is very clear – almost 100% of the respondents use the bicycle from May to September. For 29.6% of the respondents, the 2022 Zagłębie Critical Mass was their first one, for the remaining 70.4% it was not, of which 10.2% admitted that they had always participated in the event. The surveyed cyclists most often indicated that they were attending the critical mass with friends (44.7%).

Table 3. Structure of respondents to the survey carried out during the Zagłębie Critical Mass (Source: author's own elaboration based on survey)

Feature		Value	Percentage
Gender	Female	74	37.6
	Male	123	62.4
Average age		41	
Purpose of daily cycling	Recreational only	76	38.6
	Predominance of recreational purpose	78	39.6
	Recreational and transport (equally)	29	14.7
	Predominance of the transport purpose	14	7.1
Period of bicycle use	January	35	17.8
	February	44	22.3
	March	83	42.1
	April	149	75.6
	May	196	99.5
	June	196	99.5
	July	195	99.0
	August	193	98.0
	September	189	95.9
	October	139	70.6
	November	56	28.4
	December	36	18.3
Which time the respondent is attending/has attended the event	First	58	29.6
	Second	28	14.3
	Third	22	11.2
	Fourth	16	8.2
	Fifth	35	17.9
	Sixth	3	1.5
	Seventh	2	1.0
	Eighth	5	2.6
	Ninth	1	0.5
	Tenth	5	2.6
	Eleventh	1	0.5
	Always	20	10.2
With whom the respondent is attending the event this year	by him-/herself	37	18.8
	with family (no children under 18 years of age)	41	20.8
	with family (with children under 18 years of age)	50	25.4
	with friends	88	44.7

The results gathered in the main part of the survey were divided according to two groups of participants – those taking part in the Zagłębie Critical Mass for the first time and those that had already participated previously. The proposed breakdown allowed us to indicate what influences the continuing popularity of this type of event and what factors determine the need to participate in critical masses. Firstly, the objectives of participation in the action in question were analysed (Fig. 2).

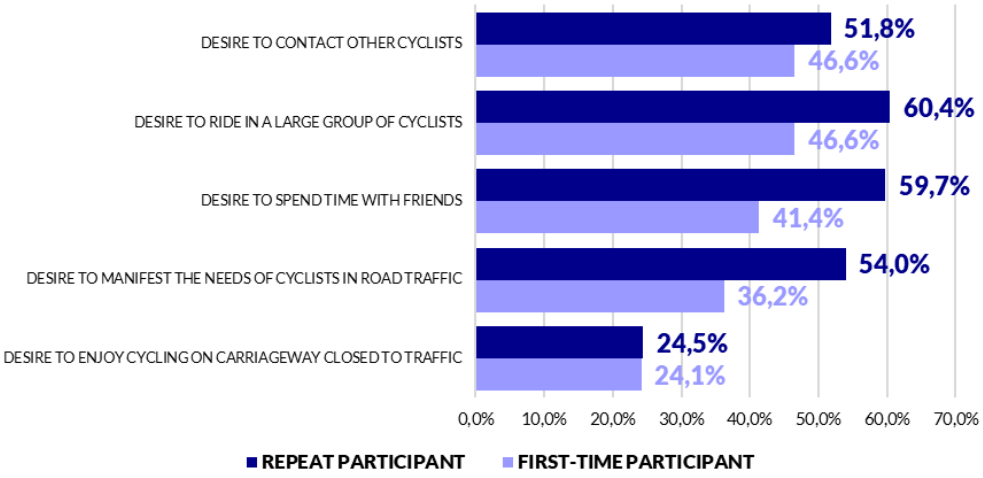


Fig. 2. Distribution of answers to the question "For what purpose do you participate in the Zagłębie Critical Mass?" according to participant groups (Source: Author's own elaboration based on survey)

Those that had already participated in the critical mass were generally more likely to indicate certain goals for participating in the event (Fig. 2). Of greatest importance to this group was the desire to ride in a large group of cyclists (60.4%) and to spend time with friends (59.7%). It should also be noted that the urge to manifest the needs of cyclists in traffic was also frequently indicated (54.0%). For those participating for the first time, the desire to interact with other cyclists and to ride in a large group of cyclists were paramount (46.6% of responses each).

The survey also further asked about the factors influencing the decision to participate in the critical mass in 2022. The results are shown in Figure 3.

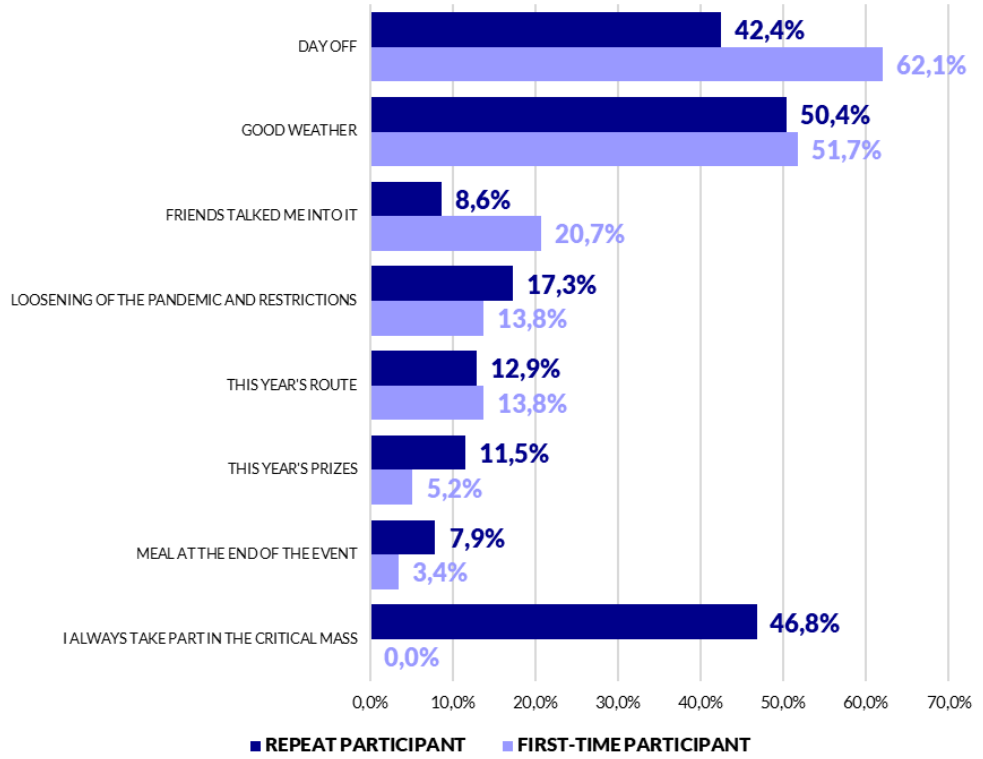


Fig. 3. Distribution of answers to the question "What factors influenced your decision to take part in the Zagłębie Critical Mass this year?" according to participant groups (Source: Author's own elaboration based on survey)

The decision to participate in the Zagłębie Critical Mass was mainly influenced by its date – on a day off (62.1% of first-time participants and 42.4% of repeat participants) and the weather (51.7% of first-time participants and 50.4% of repeat participants) (Fig. 3). For those who came to the event for the first time, the factor related to the persuasion of friends was also clearly more influential (20.7%). As many as 46.8% of respondents attending the mass indicated that they always attend the event.

A clear difference is also visible in the question of familiarity with the idea of a critical mass event between people who participated in the event for the first time and those who had already taken part in its previous versions. The survey showed that 78.4% of repeat participants admitted that they are familiar with the original idea of a critical mass cycling event (Fig. 4). Among those making their debut at the event, this was stated by 62.1%. It is worth noting that actual familiarity with the idea was only partially verified in the survey, i.e., during CAPI data collection. It was shown then that not everyone surveyed, despite their declarations, knew what a critical mass event was and what its history is.

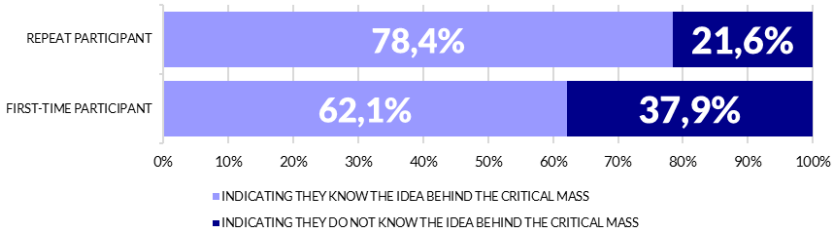


Fig. 4. Distribution of answers to the question on declared knowledge of the original idea of a critical mass event by participants (Source: author's own elaboration based on survey)

5. Discussion

The study indicated that the critical mass events organised in Poland in the 21st century differ slightly from their prototypes from the 1990s. Although in some elements they are reminiscent of the first events of this kind, they should now be considered more as a collective ride of cyclists for entertainment purposes. The analysis undertaken showed the biggest differences were mainly in terms of their organisation and purpose.

Contemporary critical masses and similar events are widely promoted and their routes are pre-determined and publicly available (JOHNSON ET AL., 2022). A large role in this transformation was played by the development of the Internet, social media, and other modern communication technologies, which, as indicated by SUNIO ET AL. (2021) became an efficient tool for cycling activists. Moreover, in line with GARCIA-HERRERA & GARCIA-MENESES (2020), this type of solution may even initiate the critical mass event phenomenon. The revolution in technology has meant that the spontaneous nature of these events, which played an important role in the 1990s, has partly disappeared and changed. Most of the currently organised critical mass events in Polish cities take place on non-working days, or on working days, but at later hours, which, as the survey showed, highly boosts participation. This effect is particularly noticeable among newcomers. However, this idea is incompatible with the original intention that the events be held on Fridays during peak hours (BLICKSTEIN & HANSON, 2001). However, this contradiction to the original principle of critical mass events has the positive effect of increasing interest in this action. On the one hand, moving critical mass events to non-working days shifts the role of such actions from demonstrations affecting daily transport to a more accessible weekend event for working city-dwellers and less disruptive for drivers. Greater participation in such events may translate into increased interest in cycling in general, including use for transport purposes.

Although it is impossible to compare the current participants with those who took part in events in the 1990s, some differences can be demonstrated from the survey. The creators and participants of the first such rides originated mainly from the community of daily users of bicycles as a means of transport. Currently, many of the participants of the critical mass events are recreational cyclists; thus, they do not fight for the rights of cyclists on the roads to the same extent as their predecessors. The study found that a critical mass event was mainly an opportunity for participants to spend time together with friends, which is in line with the findings of WILLIAMS (2018), who defined critical mass events as a gathering of cycling enthusiasts.

In the light of the analysis undertaken, the critical mass events appear to be primarily a joyful emanation of cycling culture and a platform for cyclists to have fun together. However, as CASTANEDA (2019) points out, emphasising the entertaining nature of these events does not invalidate the idea of promoting mobility; on the contrary, it conveys it in a more accessible and inviting way. Elsewhere, STEHLIN (2014) indicates that the confrontational nature of the critical mass events has softened, which was also observed in this study – the participants are more oriented towards a pleasurable leisure activity. Already with the initial critical mass events, a lack of consensus can be observed in the evaluation of their form. BLICKSTEIN & HANSON (2001) describe these events as protests of some kind, but CARLSSON (2002) rejects this by referring to the critical masses as protests, calling them 'celebrations of choosing the bicycle'. This may indicate that evolution took place quite early on, or that from the beginning the aims of the critical mass events were unspecified and the event itself open to all regardless of the demands they brought with them.

6. Conclusions

Today's organised critical mass events have undergone an evolution since they were first held. Not only has the way they are organised changed, but also partly their nature. A manifesto mainly concerned with the transport role of the bicycle has evolved over time into a major event celebrating cycling. A modern critical mass event, despite having moved away from some of its original features, plays a number of important roles for urban society. The study found that:

- it is a form of meeting for people with similar interests, thus fostering social integration,
- it is a form of leisure,
- it promotes the bicycle as a recreational tool, which is important in the context of health-promoting policies of cities and increasing physical activity of their inhabitants,
- to a lesser extent than before, but still significantly, it carries forward the idea and reiterates the aim improving conditions for cycling in daily urban transport.

Despite the evolution that critical mass events have undergone over the years, they are still an important form of urban activism. However, a turn of direction has been observed from the fight for the improvement of cycling conditions towards the general promotion of cycling, which is particularly important in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. Thus, contemporary cycling critical masses continue to fulfil important goals for the development of cycling, at the same time acting to increase physical and social activity of the urban population. Future research should also consider the perspective of municipal authorities and the direction of public debate. While, as FURNESS (2007) and LUHTAKALLIO (2018) point out, critical mass events in the past pushed local governments to consider the topic of cycling, thus the role of these events in shaping the contemporary cycling discourse should be reviewed.

In spite of some transformations and a partial departure from the original idea which related solely to the transport character of cycling, critical mass events certainly encourage the use of bicycles. However, the assessment of the real impact of critical masses on increasing the number of cyclists in towns and cities requires further research to clearly confirm this thesis. Even if the events in question contribute to the use of bicycles for recreational rather than transport purposes, this should also be considered as a benefit, especially in the dimension of increasing physical activity of the urban population.

A significant limitation of this study was the insufficient amount of available information on critical mass events organised in Poland in recent years. This is because the lack of reliable data on these events has made it difficult to trace their operation in individual years of the last three decades. However, the results obtained in the study can provide a starting point for further considerations related to the changing idea of a bicycle critical mass event. Having knowledge of the main motivations of the participants of the contemporary event, we can deepen the research by verifying, e.g., whether they identify with the purposes of the organisers of the first such events, as well as their perception of contemporary urban space in the context of its adaptation to the needs of cycling. Research related to the phenomenon of critical mass events should be continued so that we can understand the role these events serve both for their participants and for the practice of shaping urban space.

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