

Cycling: Which do you prefer, car or bike culture?

by [Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News](#)

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Pitt Meadows is already a nice place to live if you like biking, but the city continues to look for ways to make it safer, more convenient and better.

Pitt Meadows is still looking for more applicants for several volunteer positions on its new active transportation advisory committee.

Sometimes people tell me investment in cycling infrastructure is a waste of money; it's no use trying to convince more people to use their bikes to get around. They feel that most Canadians will never adopt a cycling culture; they love their cars, and that's just the way things are.

I beg to differ.

When you transplant the average Dutch person into a car-dominated environment, such as what we have in our Canadian communities, she may very well leave the bike in the shed and start driving to get around, just like everybody else. A Dutch person would very quickly realize that cycling is much less convenient, and not as safe and easy as in the Netherlands.

So what happens when a foreigner from a car-centred country moves to the Netherlands?

That's what I asked my sister-in-law, Nuria, who is from Spain, a country with a car-culture that only in recent years cycling's popularity has started to increase.

For the past decade or so, Nuria has lived in the Netherlands.

She told me that, as a child, growing up in the city of Pamplona, she had to take the bus to school. It was quite far and it was considered too dangerous to bike because of the heavy car traffic. She often used her bike when her family spent the summer holidays in Fustiñana, a small town along the river Ebro, where she'd enjoy little adventures exploring among the vegetable gardens. There were few cars and it was much safer than in the big city.

Once she went to university, she walked a lot. She didn't feel safe on her bike because of the many crazy drivers on the road.

When she visited Pamplona fairly recently, she noticed that, thanks to the construction of new bike paths around the downtown, there are a lot more people on bikes.

After moving to the Netherlands, Nuria decided to start biking. She says it's a world of difference compared to Spain. At the time living on the outskirts of the old city of Delft, it was much more convenient and faster to bike than to drive. She felt more comfortable on her bike than driving, having to deal with all the busy bike traffic, trams and busses.

Nuria thinks the difference is in the many bike paths, but also the quiet residential streets. Of course it helps that the country is so flat.

People in the Netherlands are usually quite aware of the presence of cyclists. It's not just the culture, but also education, Nuria explains.

When she started biking, she wasn't in very good shape. My brother Emiel would sometimes have to push her with heavy winds, rain or longer distances. The choice of using her bike for transportation is an easy one; Nuria says it's fast, easy, safe and great for her health. She's never been terribly interested in sports, so cycling is a great way for her to stay fit without having to go to a gym. She feels that when she's not in a hurry, biking makes her feel more connected to her surroundings. In Spain, she prefers to walk.

Now living in a suburb of Utrecht and with two young children, she has to pedal a little harder when she transports the boys to school in the cozy Babboe bakfiets, a cargo tricycle which many parents use for this purpose. They love it.

Fabian, 7, is now old enough to ride his own bike to school. But Nuria sometimes prefers to have both of them in the bakfiets when she's in a hurry. Unfortunately, these days many busy parents drop their kids off by car on their way to work and Nuria is happy she can avoid the parking chaos when she bikes with the boys. The odd time she'll take the car when the rains are too heavy or the wind is too strong.

Culture is something that changes over time, and when it comes to choice of mode of transportation, much depends on the infrastructure.

About 40 years ago, the U.K. and the Netherlands were quite similar in the way people got around. The Dutch decided to get serious about building safe and convenient cycling infrastructure for all ages and abilities, whereas the British did not.

The result: a car culture in the U.K. and a bicycle culture in the Netherlands.