

Pedaling Towards Partnership: The Role of Cycling Diplomacy



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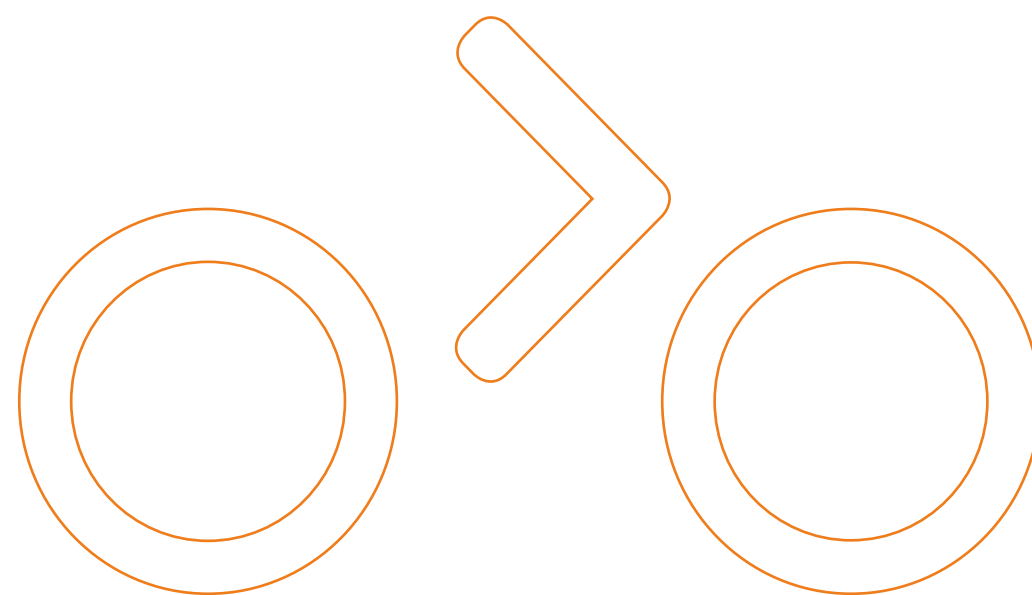
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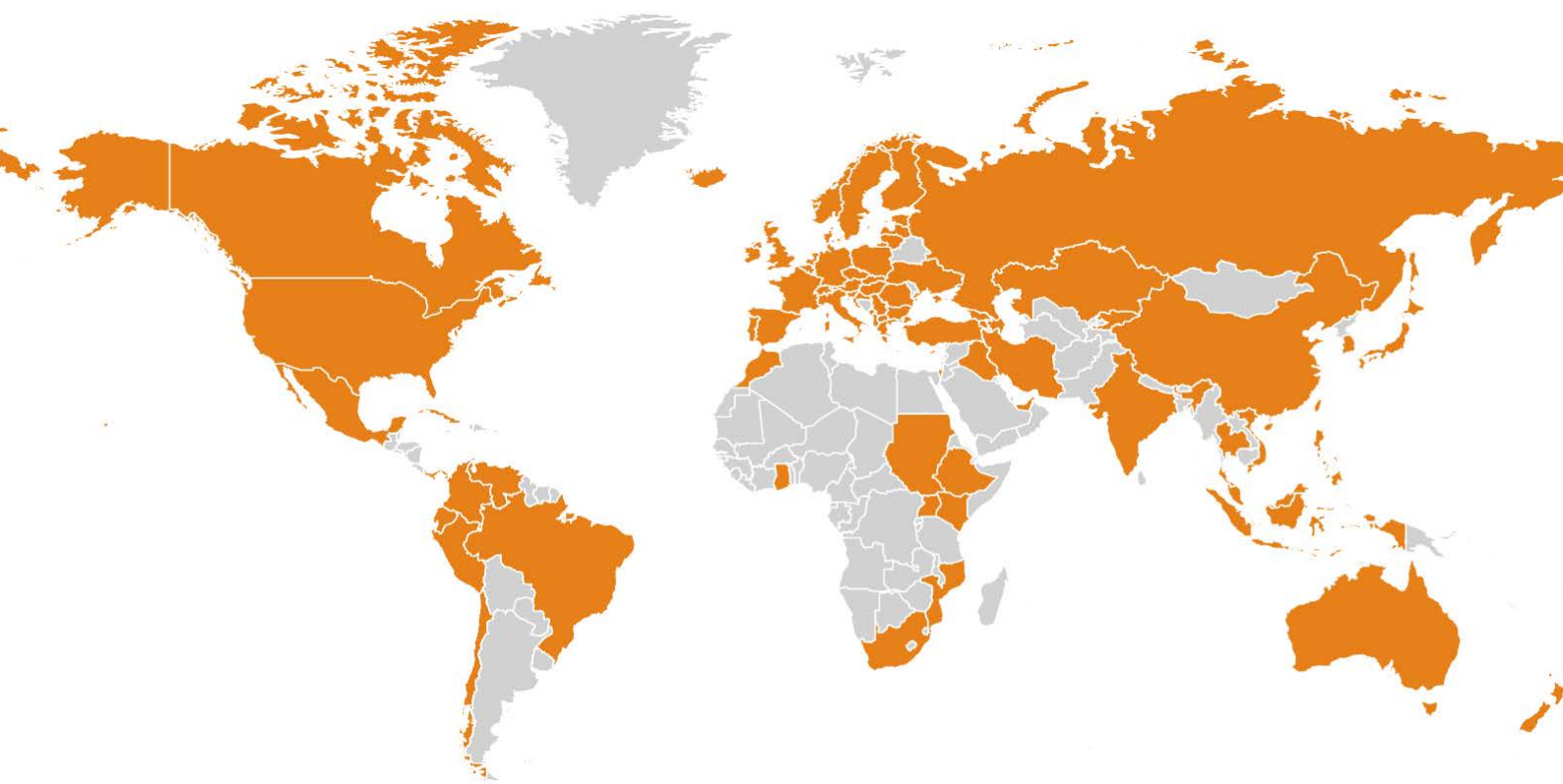
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2024 Incoming requests by country



01. Introduction to the Dutch Cycling Embassy

The Dutch Cycling Embassy's (DCE) stated mission is to help cities around the world become more bicycle-friendly and experience the advantages of having cycling as a safe, sustainable, and inclusive transport option. The DCE acts as an intermediary between demand for Dutch cycling expertise and Dutch professionals that can provide insight and support. Operating as a public-private network for promoting bicycle mobility, the DCE connects partner municipalities and organizations with private companies, NGOs, research institutions, and government agencies from the Netherlands.

The DCE team has been passionate about sustainable, safe and comfortable cycling since 2011, helping to create liveable, healthy and active cycling cities for all. Since its foundation, the Dutch Cycling Embassy has established a network with over 100 Dutch organizations and dozens of experts dedicated to sharing their expertise internationally. Together with

its team of enthusiastic Dutch and international colleagues, the DCE has built an expansive global presence and a trusted reputation as the gateway to Dutch cycling knowledge.

In order to achieve its goal of sharing Dutch cycling expertise, the DCE provides a range of resources that help people to gain practical knowledge, to become exposed to new points of view and to develop their own, and to cultivate motivation and inspiration. Additionally, the DCE hosts study visits, webinars, ThinkBike Workshops, ACTIVE Trainings, and provides guest lectures and routine content through blog posts. Reaching over 150K followers across various social media platforms, the Dutch Cycling Embassy continues to deepen its efforts and reach new audiences. Equipped with a broad set of tools and a well of information and experience to pull from, the Dutch Cycling Embassy and its network are a powerful force to facilitate cycling worldwide.



Amsterdam museumplein pro-bike protest (1977)



Before and after of Eerste van der Helststraat in Amsterdam

02. A Dutch Approach to Public Diplomacy

Understood as the practice of engaging with a foreign audience to strengthen relationships, build trust, and foster cooperation, public diplomacy is an essential tool for international relations. Public diplomacy offers a way to exercise soft power, whereby the attraction towards and admiration of cultural assets, political ideals, and expertise of a given nation are used to achieve influence.¹ In the case of the Netherlands, the soft power potential of cycling as a mechanism for public diplomacy provides a unique opportunity for the Dutch to build goodwill, attract interest, and open doors for deeper cooperation. Much like 'sauna diplomacy' in Finland, in which the historical and everyday connection to sauna culture is used to create space for diplomatic sociability,² 'cycling diplomacy' offers a distinctly Dutch entry point for international engagement and the creation of positive social interactions.

Although cycling has been popular in the Netherlands since the

late 19th century, its ubiquitous role in Dutch culture, and thus its inevitable influence on public diplomacy, can be traced to social movements of the 1970s.³ During this time, grassroots organizations put pressure on public authorities to make both cities, and cycling, safer. As a result of these efforts, urban planning policies evolved to incorporate cycling as a meaningful form of mobility. The infrastructure changes that followed, such as the design and implementation of comprehensive cycling networks, gradually attracted people of all ages, abilities and incomes to cycling.⁴ Since this time, cycling has become synonymous with Dutch culture and central to the public image of the Netherlands. In a country where bicycles now outnumber residents and approximately one out of every four trips is made by bicycle,⁵ cycling has become an unavoidable aspect of reality for the Dutch, an international source of inspiration,⁶ and now an indispensable asset for public diplomacy.

Cycling diplomacy is not simply about promoting bicycles; it is about embracing cycling as a relational tool. This form of public diplomacy offers a chance for Dutch diplomats, experts, and officials to create shared experiences that foster mutual understanding. Due to the ways in which cycling is embedded in the national identity, infrastructure, and way of life, cycling diplomacy is truly bespoke to the Netherlands. The reputation of the Netherlands as a cycling nation, the credibility of Dutch expertise, as well as the friendly nature of cycling as an activity are just some of the ways in which cycling diplomacy can take shape. Moreover, the numerous benefits of cycling such as minimal CO₂ footprint, improved air quality, enhanced quality of public space, enhanced quality of life, and a low-cost and accessible form of transportation⁵ allows for those using cycling diplomacy to connect across issues and with a variety of stakeholders. Although cycling diplomacy is already employed by Dutch missions and support offices across the globe, this report aims to further analyze and explore the role of this diplomatic asset. It highlights the central role the DCE

plays in supporting cycling diplomacy by acting as the connective tissue between Dutch expertise and international interest. Furthermore, it enumerates key examples and provides guidance on how cycling diplomacy can be effectively utilized. Given its potential as a tactic for broader diplomatic engagement and its relevance to pressing issues like active mobility and sustainability, cycling diplomacy is a valuable instrument in the Dutch diplomatic toolkit, one that deserves greater recognition, strategic coordination, and long-term support.

“There’s still so much untapped potential for biking as a tool for public diplomacy.”⁷

—Daniela Nuñez Zurita,
Public Diplomacy and
Communications Officer
of Embassy of the
Kingdom of the
Netherlands in Mexico

03. Project Overview

In order to develop a body of work around cycling diplomacy—and to reflect on the value of cycling as a diplomatic asset—this report synthesizes insights from a series of semi-structured interviews with Dutch embassies, consulates general, consulates and support offices around the world. The interview protocol was designed to explore how the Netherlands’ reputation as a cycling nation shapes diplomatic engagement; to understand in what capacity missions are working with the Dutch Cycling Embassy or local organizations; to learn how cycling has helped to build or maintain relationships; to see what might make cycling diplomacy more

effective; and to gather concrete examples of cycling diplomacy in action.

This research would not have been possible without the time and generous contributions of representatives from the following Embassies, Consulates General, Consulates, and Netherlands Business Support Offices (NBSO) of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in:

Austria (Vienna), Brazil (Brasília), Canada (Toronto), Germany (Berlin), Ireland (Dublin), Mexico (Mexico City), Morocco (Rabat), Poland (Warsaw), Portugal (Lisbon), Spain (Barcelona), Sweden (Stockholm), Thailand (Bangkok), USA (Miami, New York and Washington D.C.).



His Majesty, King of the Netherlands, Willem-Alexander on opening bike ride for Velo-city 2017

Photo: Decisio

04. Cycling Diplomacy in Action

Cycling diplomacy takes many forms across Dutch embassies, consulates general, consulates, and support offices around the world. While grounded in the Netherlands' unique cultural identity and technical expertise, its expression varies widely depending on local context, priorities, resources, and available partnerships. From symbolic rides and public events to workshops and study visits, cycling diplomacy can be woven into existing diplomatic efforts, providing a low-cost, high-impact means of engagement.

Though often informal or ad hoc, these activities create meaningful opportunities to build trust, showcase

Dutch expertise, and support shared goals around sustainability, health, and mobility. Each opportunity for cycling diplomacy is a chance to sow seeds of connection and lay the groundwork for deeper relationships and nuanced strategies over time. By providing a deep dive on the role of cycling diplomacy in four international contexts—Ireland, Mexico, Poland, and Thailand—and overview that highlights how cycling shows up in Austria, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United States, this section aims to capture the range, creativity, and everyday relevance of cycling diplomacy across the globe.



Orange bike rack gifted to Frankfurt

Photo: Netherlands Business Support Office in Frankfurt, Germany

“Public diplomacy and cycling keeps me going. When you get feedback from communities that they, through our collaboration, have established either a new bike lane or bicycle parking facility near a train station...those are wins I really enjoy hearing about, and I know that those all started through building these relationships, and they’re all rooted in public diplomacy.”⁸

—Stefan Theunissen, Senior Economic Policy Officer for the Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Miami



Dutch ambassador to Ireland poses with the Lord Mayor of Dublin



Dutch ambassador visits founder of the Good Bikes Project during Bike Week

05. Ireland

Over the past several years, the Netherlands has developed a strong and visible cycling presence in Ireland. Informed by a mix of technical exchange, cultural engagement, and symbolic gestures, cycling diplomacy has helped to build good-will and generate opportunities for collaboration between the two countries. These efforts have been facilitated by the DCE, which serves as a trusted partner and intermediary, as well as the Dutch reputation as a cycling nation, which is widely recognized in Ireland.⁹ Cycling is easily leveraged as a positive point of association across diplomatic encounters and the efficacy of cycling diplomacy has been reinforced by Ireland's national priorities, such as the National Cycle Policy Framework and Climate Action Plan,¹⁰ which emphasize the role of cycling as a means to reduce emissions and promote active travel.

Vital to Dutch-Irish cycling diplomacy is the steady flow of bilateral exchange in the form of study visits and cycling missions. With the support of the Dutch Cycling Embassy, a number of delegations from Irish municipalities—including counties Carlow, Laois, Mayo and Wicklow—have visited the Netherlands to learn from and experience Dutch infrastructure first-hand. In response to the large number of local authorities that have ventured from Ireland to the Netherlands, in 2023, a Dutch cycling mission embarked on a three-day fact-finding trip to learn from the experience and context of their Irish counterparts. Consisting of four experts from the fields of traffic engineering, street and public space design, product design, bike parking, and mobility consulting, this visit to Ireland provided an opportunity to create new relationships and reinforce old ones. Meetings with the National Transport Authority (NTA), Department of Transport, and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) allowed for conversations around the possibility of linking cycling and rail facilities,¹¹ a common multi-modal approach found in the Netherlands. Joined by the Dutch ambassador on a bike ride through Greystones, the cycling mission also reconnected with members of the County Wicklow delegation,¹² who just a month prior visited the Netherlands to better understand how to improve urban-rural and leisure cycling infrastructure.

Building off these efforts, a 2024 cycling mission to Cork and Dublin helped to open the door for strategic economic engagement. Over the course of four days, a delegation of 16 Dutch companies representing a broad range of cycling-related

interests—such as bike parking, behavior change, network and infrastructure design, and bike manufacturing¹³—participated in a variety of activities. In conversation with the NTA and TII, they learned about the ambitions of the national government and the consultancy frameworks that underpin Irish public procurement processes. By incorporating an organized bike tour of South Dublin, however, this mission was more than business as usual. Undeterred by rainy weather and accompanied by both the Dutch ambassador and Mayor of South Dublin, the delegation of Dutch companies explored recently completed infrastructure projects on two wheels. Through their in-person visit, this delegation gained important insights and helped to establish a broader network and stronger foundation for partnership.

Although technical expertise and economic engagement have opened space for meaningful dialogue about Ireland's path toward active transportation, cycling diplomacy in Ireland has also been reinforced by symbolic gestures. In advance of Dublin hosting the Velo-city Conference, and during a 2019 state visit, His Majesty King of the Netherlands, Willem-Alexander, and Her Majesty Queen of the Netherlands, Máxima, presented the newly appointed Lord Mayor of Dublin with bicycle shaped bike racks as a gesture of goodwill.¹⁴ These bike racks embodied the King's sentiment that mobility is a source of connection between the two countries.¹⁵ Today, the racks remain visible and continue to serve not only as echoes of that visit, but also as diplomatic touchpoints, resurfacing in embassy visits and social media posts as ongoing symbols of connection and shared values. Similarly, over the years, Dutch ambassadors to Ireland have made a number of symbolic gestures that have not only helped to reinforce Dutch cycling identity abroad but also built rapport with local communities. In 2019, the Dutch ambassador participated in a "school cycle bus,"¹⁶ a campaign where volunteers escort children to school on bikes, helping raise awareness of the grassroots efforts for safer streets while also signaling Dutch values of mobility, health, and urban sustainability. To express support and solidarity for an initiative dedicated to supplying used bikes to refugees, known as the Good Bikes Project, the Dutch ambassador was present for the donation of the 500th bike to a Ukrainian mother,¹⁷ and again during Bike Week this year.¹⁸ In this way, Dutch ambassadors have taken it upon themselves to show up, participate, and affirm the role that cycling can play in public diplomacy and in community connection.



Photo: Dutch Cycling Embassy
2024 Cycling Mission Bike Tour



Photo: The Good Bikes Project
Good Bikes Project 500th bike donation



World Bicycle Day celebration



Día de Los Muertos decoration

o6. Mexico

The success of cycling diplomacy in Mexico can in large part be attributed to effective participation in local cycling events. Acting as a springboard for community engagement, these events, particularly ones associated with the United Nations' World Bicycle Day, have provided the Netherlands Embassy in Mexico with an ongoing platform to highlight the potential of cycling and draw attention to the Netherlands as a leader in active mobility. These strategic efforts have recently been bolstered by the 2025-2030 Cycling Plan, launched by Mexico City on World Bicycle Day this year. In anticipation of the FIFA World Cup, this plan solidifies Mexico City's interest in cycling infrastructure, aiming to transform the city into a model of urban mobility. This plan not only cites expansion of the Ecobici bike sharing program with an additional 20,000 bikes, promotion of night rides and bike schools, and creation new cycling corridors and parking facilities, but importantly, it also provides continued momentum and justification for the role of cycling diplomacy.¹⁹

A unique opportunity to bridge Dutch cycling culture with local experiences in ways that build goodwill and visibility has been through the city-wide open-streets program held each Sunday by Mexico City's Department of Mobility (SEMOVI). Known as Muévete en Bici, this weekly event consists of a 6-hour car-free period with educational booths, bike mechanics, and bike schools and is attended by over 90,000 people.²⁰ In particular, each year, SEMOVI hosts a special edition of this event organized around World Bicycle Day, to which the Dutch Embassy has been invited many times. At these yearly events, which also involve city-wide rallies and educational campaigns, the NL Embassy has provided bike bells and bike totes, offered quizzes about mobility in the Netherlands, and hosted a virtual reality experience that enables users to simulate a bike ride through Amsterdam.²¹ These VR experiences have also been hosted during Paseo Nocturno, a night-time bike ride celebration held around Día de Muertos.²² In 2024, however, the NL Embassy, in partnership with KLM, offered cycling event attendees more than just a virtual glimpse of Dutch cycling infrastructure. As part of an annual bicycle-based treasure hunt held around World Bicycle Day and hosted by the Mexico City Historic Center Trust and SEMOVI, a grand prize of two round-trip tickets to Amsterdam was given to the winners allowing them to experience cycling in the Netherlands for themselves.²³

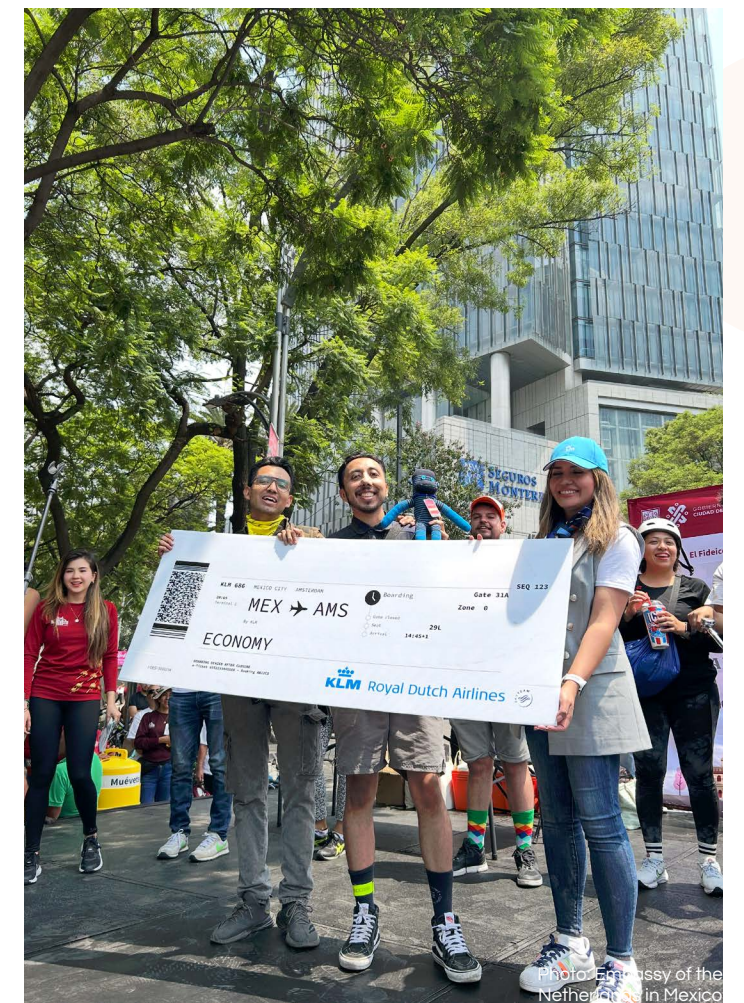
By positioning itself as a key sponsor and frequent contributor to local cycling events, the Netherlands Embassy has established a basis upon which to strengthen relationships with public organizations, embed a Dutch presence within local celebrations, and instill positive associations with the Netherlands. Though this tactic has been essential, engagement with local cycling events has not been the only example of cycling diplomacy in Mexico. As part of the Alliance for Cycling and Walking Towards International Vitality and Empowerment (ACTIVE), a program led by the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg with the goal of training 10,000 mobility experts in the Global South over the next decade, DCE hosted an active mobility workshop in Oaxaca.²⁴ As the first workshop of its kind in Mexico, it served a catalyst of diplomatic engagement, featuring opening remarks from Oaxaca's Secretary of Mobility and the Deputy Ambassador of the Netherlands to Mexico, and convened stakeholders from the Oaxaca's Ministry of Mobility and surrounding municipalities. Additionally, cycling diplomacy has been facilitated in Mexico through a viewing of the Dutch cycling documentary, "When We Cycle." Hosted by the Netherlands Embassy in partnership with local organizations, this screening at the Oaxaca Children's Museum helped expose a wider audience to Dutch cycling culture, and, through its focus on imagining the role of cycling in society, gave Oaxacan moviegoers an opportunity to reflect on the future of cycling in their own city.

“From a public diplomacy perspective cycling is used in many other events that are not always bike-related. It's one of the main things that the Netherlands is known for and we use it as an anchor.”²⁵

—Janely Marcial Hernandez, Senior Economic Adviser for Circular Economy & Mobility at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Mexico



Rally Bicitando el Patrimonio flyer



Round-trip flight to Amsterdam grand prize



2025 Bike Week Flyer



Ambassador Wilfred Mohr celebrates World Bicycle Day with a new e-bike



2024 Car-Free Day cycling tour of Warsaw



World Bicycle Day stamp



Warsaw Bicycle Day ride

07. Poland

With over a decade of engagement through cycling-related activities at the Netherlands Embassy in Poland, cycling diplomacy has been a longstanding element of relationship building.²⁶ These efforts have been facilitated by a strong interest in cycling-based knowledge exchange as well as by the Netherlands reputation as a cycling country, which is well-known and positively received in Poland.²⁷ Further supported by a robust bicycle manufacturing industry in Poland and a recent report by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency titled “Urban Mobility, City Logistics & Cycling, Exploring Business Opportunities for Dutch Enterprises in Poland,”²⁸ cycling diplomacy has become a practical and trusted avenue for engagement between the Netherlands and Poland. Grounded in a long history of participation and strengthened by recurring events and shared interest, it offers a familiar and effective way to build relationships, share expertise, and explore new opportunities, particularly as Polish cities expand their focus on sustainable mobility.

At the heart of cycling diplomacy in Poland is the Netherlands Embassy’s consistent participation in recurring campaigns. For example, Cycling May, a yearly campaign to encourage children to cycle to school, has offered a reliable opportunity for engagement with Polish youth. In contribution to a Cycling May competition held in Warsaw, the NL Embassy has organized various prizes. In the past, the Embassy organized a free field trip to an ethnographic museum related to Dutch-Polish history,²⁹ and most recently it hosted a visit to the Embassy itself where children got the chance to taste stroopwafels, try on clogs, and go on a virtual bike ride.³⁰ Likewise, the annual Suits on Bikes event, a bike to work ride hosted by the Eurobuild Conferences,³¹ has been an opportunity to engage with a different sector the Polish population and is regularly attended by Dutch diplomats such as the ambassador or deputy head of mission.³² Visibility for the Netherlands Embassy has also come through participation in Car-Free Day on September 22nd. Celebrated on the final day of European Mobility Week, in 2024 this event posed a unique opportunity to develop diplomatic relationships. A high-profile cycling tour of Warsaw was organized with participation from representatives from cycling NGOs in various municipalities, the Ministry of Infrastructure, the Polish Bicycle Summit, and the Dutch ambassador

to Poland, as well as the ambassadors of Austria, Estonia, Greece, Norway, Romania, and Switzerland.³³ In recent years, an added opportunity for engagement has been the Warsaw Bicycle Day. Held around World Bicycle Day, this event celebrates cycling culture in the city of Warsaw and offers the Dutch Embassy a public platform to strengthen relationships, and showcase shared values through the symbolic act of cycling. Lastly, participation in the nascent Polish Bicycle Summit has become a way to maintain ongoing visibility on a national scale, and continue sharing information and fostering relationships in support of active mobility. Under the slogan “Bicycles connect people,” this summit attracted policy makers, urban planners, mobility experts, and cycling enthusiasts, and included a group bike ride attended by the conference organizers, local government officials and politicians, an Olympic champion, and ambassadors of Finland, France and the Netherlands.³⁴

While recurring events have taken center stage for Dutch-Polish cycling diplomacy, special events, like this year’s Velo-city conference, have also helped to give cycling diplomacy in Poland a meaningful boost in visibility and substance. Drawing international attention, and offering concentrated opportunities for high-level engagement and technical exchange, this global bicycle summit provides a strong platform for each host country to showcase their cycling transformations. In celebration of the conference being hosted in Poland for the first time, and in effort to highlight Poland’s cycling transformation, the Dutch ambassador cycled over 350 km from Warsaw to the host city, Gdańsk.³⁵ Drawing positive media attention, this 3-day journey served as symbolic gesture that affirmed the Netherlands’ commitment to sustainable mobility and its role as a supportive partner of Poland’s developing cycling infrastructure. By arriving at Velo-city on two wheels, the ambassador not only embodied the values of cycling diplomacy but also illustrated the underlying potential and tangible progress of Poland’s own mobility goals.



Cycling May flyer



Cycling May winner trying on Dutch clogs



Ambassador Jennes de Mol on route to Velo-city



Ambassador Jennes de Mol arrives in Gdańsk



Photo: United Nations Thailand

Bike ride for 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign



Photo: The Embassy of the Netherlands in Thailand

Bike The Talk Event flyer



Photo: The Embassy of Netherlands in Thailand

When We Cycle screening

o8. Thailand

Dutch cycling diplomacy in Thailand, and Bangkok in particular, has strategically and skillfully combined a range of practices grounded in the promotion of Dutch cycling culture, technical exchange, partnerships, and community engagement. These efforts have been bolstered by the Netherlands' reputation as a cycling country, as well as the recent Bangkok Master Plan for Walking and Cycling.³⁶ Moreover, by focusing on sustainability, transportation, safety, and international collaboration and by reinforcing the ambition to Bangkok become even more livable, Governor Chadchart Sittipunt has helped cycling initiatives to gain added traction.³⁷

A core element of cycling diplomacy in Bangkok has been the Netherlands Embassy's commitment to showcasing Dutch cycling culture through public film screenings. Dutch documentaries, including "Together We Cycle" and "When We Cycle" have been shown in venues such as Chulalongkorn University, the Netherlands Residence, Bangkok City Hall during Bangkok Design Week, and a public park during the BKK Expo 2024. The first-ever Thai screening of "Together We Cycle" at Chulalongkorn University was accompanied by a panel discussion featuring a representative of the Faculty of Architecture, Walking and Cycling Institute Foundation, a representative of the Dutch Cycling Embassy, and the Dutch ambassador to Thailand.³⁸ A year later, the Dutch embassy premiered "When We Cycle", in a similar format, followed by a panel of Dutch experts and local stakeholders including representatives of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, the Bangkok Urban Cycling Alliance, Arcadis, Humankind, and the Dutch Cycling Embassy.³⁹ Inspired by socially distanced activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, some screenings have also been organized as "Bike-in" movie nights. Combining entertainment with an invitation to cycle and reflect, these screenings have reached wide audiences in Thailand while also sparking deeper conversations about Bangkok's mobility future.

Focusing on the question—how do we transform the cycling landscape of Bangkok?—"Bike the Talk" events, initiated by the Embassy in Bangkok, have provided another touchpoint for community engagement and diplomatic representation. Occasionally paired

documentary screenings and panel discussions, these events emphasize the hands-on value of cycling by incorporating a cycling tour. In November 2023, a “Bike the Talk” event began with a 15km ride through Bangkok that sought to evaluate the city’s cycling infrastructure and find opportunities for bike-friendly improvements.⁴⁰ This ride was joined by the Dutch ambassador, as well as the Governor and Deputy Governor of Bangkok, and concluded with a panel discussion at the Netherlands Residence focused on how to concretely work towards the goal of transforming Bangkok’s cycling landscape.

Other expressions of cycling diplomacy in Thailand have included hosting community events, symbolic gestures, and supporting technical exchange. By organizing Bangkok Cycling Week—a week full of activities to promote the use of the bike in Thailand’s capital—the Netherlands Embassy has set the tone as a cycling leader in Thailand. Beyond generating publicity, the week also created moments of connection such as a group ride joined by the Governor, the Deputy-Governor, the Director of the Traffic and Transportation Department, and 35 other stakeholders.⁴¹ Symbolic gestures of cycling diplomacy prompted by global and regional campaigns have also been embraced as opportunities for connection and solidarity. During World Bicycle Day, a local photo competition was held to highlight *fietsgeluk*, or “bicycle happiness.” To celebrate Bangkok’s bicycle happiness, winners were chosen by the Deputy-Ambassador and presented with Dutch souvenirs.⁴² As part of an Asia-Pacific campaign against gender based violence, the Dutch Ambassador joined in a cycling tour symbolizing the journey that must be undertaken to end gender-based violence and make Bangkok safer and more liveable for everyone. As he noted, the ambassador held true to his words that “we show our solidarity not only through our words but through our actions.”⁴³ Additionally, during an ACTIVE Workshop hosted by the DCE, cycling diplomacy was embraced as an opportunity for optimism and means of promoting technical exchange. Inspirational opening speeches by the Governor of Bangkok and the Dutch ambassador set the stage for a series of discussions on bicycle network design.⁴⁴ The success of this workshop prompted a second ACTIVE workshop as well as discussions about future cycling infrastructure collaborations between the Netherlands and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.⁴⁵



Fietsgeluk photo competition winners



Documentary screening at Netherlands Residence



World Car-Free Day bike ride in Bangkok

“We show our solidarity not only through our words but through our actions.”

—Remco van Wijngaarden, Ambassador for the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Thailand



ACTIVE workshop bike ride

09. Cycling Diplomacy Spotlights

Austria

Inauguration of the Argentinierstraße, a Dutch inspired cycling street in Vienna, provided an opportunity for a high-profile public event. The celebration in December 2024 was attended by representatives of the government, the ambassador to Austria, and included stroopwafels, music by the Dutch Bicycle Orchestra, and a visit from Sinterklaas.⁴⁶



Photo: Valentin Eisendle & Peter Provaznik
Ambassador to Austria at cycling-street inauguration

Brazil

In collaboration with the embassies of Poland, Sweden, Luxembourg, Denmark, Belgium and Germany, the NL Embassy in Brazil helped to organize a World Bicycle Day ride. This event was a chance to partner with local organizations, promote international cooperation, and emphasize active mobility.⁴⁷



Photo: The Embassy of Netherlands in Brazil

Chile

Vote by Bike was a initiative in Chile that encouraged citizens to cycle to the polls. By taking the opportunity to join Chileans on their rides to vote, including the Minister of Transport, the NL ambassador to Chile used this campaign as a unique way to build new relationships.⁴⁸

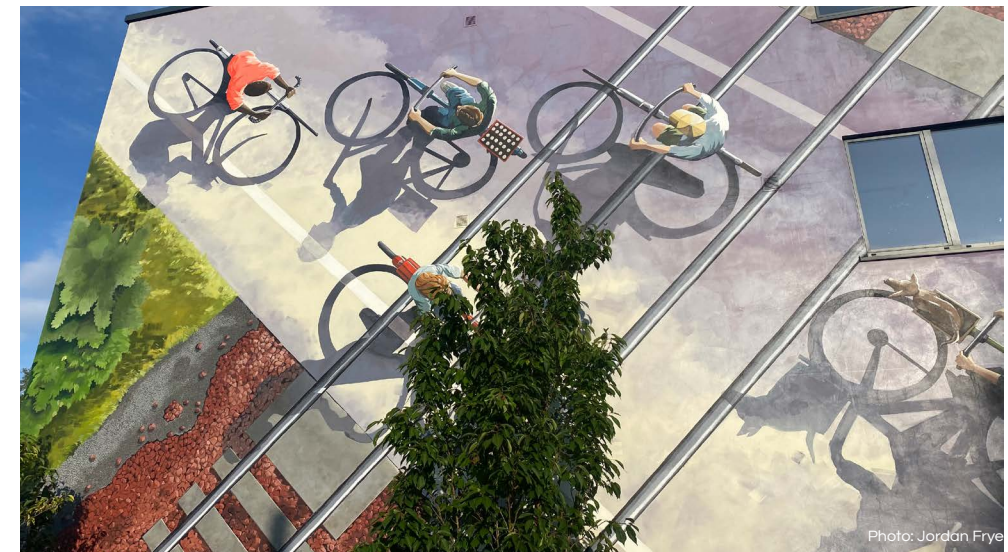


Photo: Jordan Frye

Dominican Republic

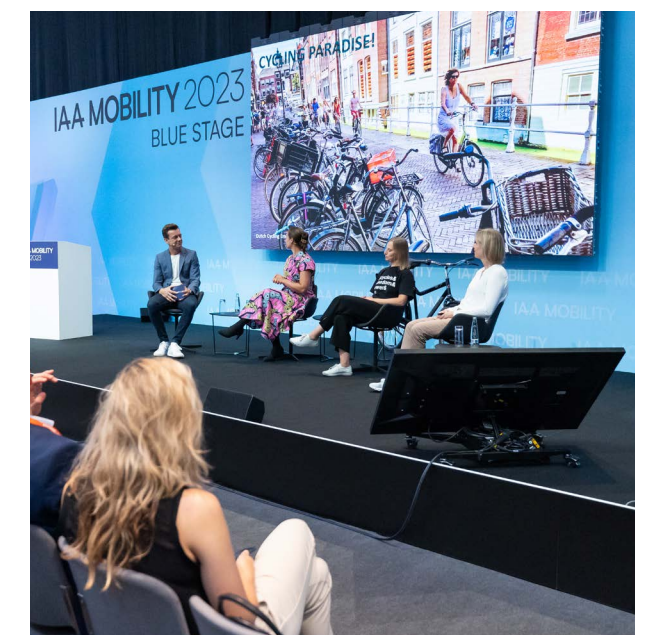
As part of Sustainable Mobility Week in the Dominican Republic, the Dutch Embassy helped organize a cycling conference as well as an Orange Bike Ride to celebrate World Car-Free Day. Supported by a visit from the ambassador to the director of the National Institute of Transit and Land Transportation (INTRANT), this conference helped raise awareness of active mobility by sharing practical examples from the Netherlands.⁴⁹



Photo: The Embassy of Netherlands in the Dominican Republic
Ambassador to the DR visits director of INTRANT

Germany

At the IAA Mobility Fair in Munich—a traditionally car-focused event—the NL Embassy and DCE brought cycling into the conversation and engaged audiences beyond the usual cycling crowd. Their presence signaled Dutch values around sustainable mobility, challenged assumptions about what modern transport can look like, and demonstrated a willingness to enter less receptive spaces in order to broaden dialogue and build new relationships.⁵⁰



DCE Presentation at 2023 IAA Mobility Fair



Cycle train ride during ThinkBike Workshop in Lisbon

Slovenia

The Dutch Embassy in Slovenia has been an active supporter and participant of the Bike to Work campaign, Polni zagona. In 2024, this national initiative involved over 1,700 cyclists who rode for a collective 230,029 km. In order to draw attention to the event, the ambassador to Slovenia provided public statements about the social benefits of cycling and to incentivize participation, the Dutch Embassy provided a voucher for a multi-day bike trip to the Netherlands.⁵²



Dutch delegation visits Barcelona

Portugal

In 2023, members of a ThinkBike Workshop in Lisbon, along with the ambassador to Portugal, joined a bike to school ride, known as a cycle-train, on the second day of their visit. Participation in this ride not only provided an opportunity for media coverage, but also helped to legitimize this new initiative.⁵¹



Ambassador to Slovenia posing in support of Polni zagona

Spain

Shortly after the Vuelta España, the Netherlands Business Support Office of Spain organized a fact-finding trip to Catalonia focused on bike mobility. The delegation, which consisted of the DCE and experts from 15 different public and private organizations, was joined by the ambassador to Spain and representatives of the city of Barcelona.⁵³

CYCLING DIPLOMACY SPOTLIGHTS

Sweden

Building on relationships formed nearly a decade ago at a two-day long cycling workshop, the Dutch Embassy in Sweden facilitated a recent DCE visit to Gothenburg. Past connections with city officials helped to form the basis of a successful trip, which included a cycling tour and breakfast dialogue at the Frihamnsdagarna democracy festival.⁵⁴

“There is value in just creating moments, events, and activities where cycling is being addressed. It’s a networking tool. It makes things easy and takes peoples’ guard down because it’s such a happy topic.”⁵⁵

—Sietze Vermeulen, Senior Press and Cultural Affairs Officer at the Consulate General for the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in New York



Breakfast dialogue at democracy festival

United States

Coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the first ThinkBike Workshop in Austin, Queen Máxima of the Netherlands went on a bike tour of the city with Mayor Steve Adler. The day of this ride was designated as Netherlands-Austin Friendship Day in acknowledgment of the enduring cultural and economic ties between these two places.⁵⁶



Her Majesty, Queen of the Netherlands, Máxima, rides with Mayor of Austin

10. Strategies for Cycling Diplomacy

Research for this report involved fifteen semi-structured interviews with representatives from Dutch embassies, consulate general, consulates, and support offices all over the world. These conversations were insightful glimpses into the role of cycling diplomacy in various countries and were a vital component of creating a more nuanced and thorough understanding of this topic. The following section presents an analysis of these interviews by drawing out key elements that influence cycling diplomacy. While these elements varied depending on the given circumstance, availability of resources, and needs of each context, they nonetheless reveal a set of common experiences. For the purpose of advancing the viability of cycling diplomacy, trends from this research are presented as recommendations and strategies.

Choose the Right Gear

Depending on the context, cycling can be a conversation starter, a facilitator of discussion, or the destination of a diplomatic process. Making use of the potential of cycling means understanding how and when to bring up the topic of two wheels. For example, when addressing active mobility, cycling is an obvious and powerful entry point. In more informal or open-ended forums, cycling can also serve as an easy and light-hearted opportunity for connection. In many instances, however, cycling is better suited as a means to an end. When approaching topics like climate, public space, sustainability, coastal management, circular economy, health, or innovation, cycling can act as the glue that connects these themes within a broader context rather than the main feature of the conversation. Cycling can help you move between topics, allowing you to bridge gaps, contextualize issues, and form a more integrated approach. Though counterintuitive, cycling may be your last stop within a dialogue or presentation, ultimately providing a simple and tangible metaphor to convey your message.

Find a Tailwind

Given the limited, and often dwindling, resources and time available to commit to public diplomacy, it's vital to find cultural and societal currents that can carry the work forward. These external conditions can serve as tailwinds, helping to provide direction and sustain momentum. For example, the perception of the Netherlands as a cycling nation is widely acknowledged and can therefore be used to gain traction. While this story can be a common refrain, it certainly bears repeating. The Dutch cycling example provides a basis of credibility and competency that, depending on the situation, can be used to your advantage.

Yearly campaigns with global recognition such as World Bicycle Day, Bike Week, Kingsday, or Tulip Days can also be used to justify activities, offer a non-political opportunity to convene actors, inspire media coverage, or serve as an entry point for cities and countries with more limited cycling agendas. Depending on popularity and commitment within a given context, growing urban trends such as 15-minute cities can also serve as tailwinds by providing favorable political and cultural climate for cycling-related messages. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted an uptick in cycling due to its role as a social-distanced form of transportation and physical activity, can serve as a useful reminder for the value of cycling. Though increasingly less salient, this global event nonetheless highlighted how quickly political will and public behavior can shift under certain conditions. Each of these examples—whether historic, symbolic or reactive—underscore the importance of recognizing and harnessing tailwinds so that cycling diplomacy efforts can achieve greater relevance and impact.

“Cycling, of course, is important, but it can be made so much more impactful if you work it into a broader context.”⁵⁷

—Harman Idema, Consul General for the Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Toronto

Join a Peloton

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In the absence of a tailwind, continue to leverage the value of cycling as a diplomatic asset by seeking or creating opportunities for partnership. In short: find a peloton. Working together on cycling and non-cycling related issues can help you to conserve resources, synchronize efforts, and pull others forward. This starts by identifying the network of decision makers, stakeholders, and organizations already active in your region, and looking for ways to sponsor, celebrate, or highlight existing cycling and cycling-adjacent initiatives. Dutch sponsorship or even the association with the Dutch cycling agenda can lend credibility, sow seeds of connection, and spark new possibilities for exchange.

Cycling diplomacy can also gain traction through active support of broader political and cultural initiatives, such as sustainable urban mobility plans, festivals, summits, conferences, car-free days, and bike-to-work and bike-to-school events. Synchronizing and strategically aligning with these events can be a low-cost, high-impact way to introduce or reinforce cycling's relevance. Depending on your capacity, hosting small events like bike-in movie screenings or larger events—like the Velo-City Conference or the EuroVelo & Cycling Tourism Conference—offer a way to take the lead and pull others in your network forward. Major events can help draw attention to the economic and cultural opportunities in your town or city, encourage meaningful engagement, and provide justification for further investment. Regardless of the scale, partnering with others can not only amplify your message but help define the direction of those around you. In this way, cycling diplomacy can serve as more than a symbol of Dutch cultural identity by providing opportunities for shared momentum and purpose.



“The advantages to cycling are plenty and implementing it is not rocket science. What it does take is planning, investment, and a lot of effort; but in return you get so much more.”⁵⁸

—Remco van Wijngaarden, Ambassador for the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Thailand

Respond to the Terrain

Operating successfully in a local context means acknowledging that each city and country are at different points on their cycling journey. With this understanding comes not only the need for respect, but also an appreciation for how to embrace differences. Responding to the terrain requires flexibility and an ability to anticipate the needs and constraints within the given situation. Depending on where you are, this might look like knowing when to wear a helmet, adopting new forms of social media, translating key resources into a relevant language, providing subtitles for a film, or refreshing old ideas so that they are tailored to a new audience. Knowing who to bring to the table, such practitioners and officials who have experience problem solving and who are seen as counterparts to those in your context, can help to build bridges and provide opportunity to find common ground.

Map the Route

It's important to understand how your cycling tactics are building to a strategy that can get you to the finish line, wherever and whenever that might be. Considering how to strategically involve cycling, rather than relying on ad hoc or informal events, can allow you better understand what is working well and what can be improved. For example, creating reports that focus on the potential of cycling, or relying on those that already exist, might also help to inform a coherent approach on how to leverage cycling diplomacy. Such documents can help you familiarize yourself with the landscape of opportunities and to be more prepared for economic and cultural opportunities that come your way. By shedding light on new terrain and markets, these documents can also incentive interest from the Netherlands, which can create a positive feedback loop that further justifies the need and value of cycling diplomacy.

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Cycling Saturation

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Making use of cycling as an effective tool or metaphor requires awareness of the degree to which it is employed and how often it is used. By overemphasizing the value of cycling, you may crowd out other priorities or reinforce cycling tunnel vision. Instead, by asking yourself how many times a given audience has heard the cycling story of the Netherlands—and responding to their level of cycling saturation—you can ensure that you don't lose their attention or water down the value of this message. It's important to keep in mind that the Dutch reputation as a cycling country can often be common knowledge, meaning that your audience already has varying degrees of awareness of this story and may grow fatigued if the message is repeated too frequently or without relevance. Being mindful not only of how strongly you emphasize cycling, but also how often you invoke it, helps preserve its impact and ensures it complements rather than dominates your broader message.

Two-way Streets

The problem, and opportunity, of active mobility is that it is predicated on relationships and trust, and that it involves societal change. As opposed to sectors like healthcare or shipping that can involve fewer actors and less politically charged content, addressing cycling infrastructure involves working with numerous stakeholders, a shift in behaviour, and ideally an alignment of values. Opening the door for connection and conversation is therefore essential to the work of cycling diplomacy. In order to build connections and cultivate the conditions for cycling, and because it may not always be obvious to local actors, it can be helpful to establish the presence of your diplomatic agency. This can be achieved in many ways, including showing up to events on two wheels, extending invitations to cycle-related activities, and emphasizing what resources you are able to offer. Once in dialogue with the community, sustained communication and meaningful follow-up with key stakeholders, government officials, and local organizations can help to continue building trust and ensure that all parties are on the same page. Likewise, opening lines of communication with the Dutch Cycling Embassy can play a vital role in advancing cycling diplomacy. This two-way street involves proactive communication from the DCE in advance of study trips and cycling missions as well as communication from missions regarding new initiatives and requests for support.

Avoid Potholes

When working in new contexts outside of the Netherlands, it's important to avoid placing expectations and assumptions that all cycling journeys lead to something that resembles the Netherlands. Not all cities and towns are interested in recreating Dutch cycling culture and for those that are ongoing comparisons to the Netherlands can often provoke feelings of discouragement. In these cases, it is important to avoid a tone of arrogance or self-importance and instead engage with humility and self-awareness to ensure that local actors sustain their interest in cycling. Acknowledging the interest and limitations of each context, while celebrating local improvements and interventions, allows for the cycling journey of each city and town to follow its own path.

Furthermore, not everyone is familiar with the history of the Netherlands transition to becoming a cycling county. Many believe that the Dutch were born this way and that the only reason people bike in the Netherlands is because it's flat. While these impressions can often play to your advantage, they can also reinforce stereotypes and confirm clichés instead of demonstrating the level of sophistication and decades of dedication involved in creating Dutch cycling infrastructure. Providing resources from the DCE, hosting panel discussions, or screening a documentary like "Together We Cycle," "Why We Cycle," or "When We Cycle," are few simple ways that you can steer clear of stereotypes and clichés and ultimately add more nuance, history, and understanding to the cycling conversation.

Walk the Talk

Getting on your bike is an ideal way to connect with the broader community, learn about initiatives, and inspire action. This could mean cycling in solidarity for a campaign, joining a casual community ride, a bike to school event, or simply riding to work on your own or with others. Additionally, riding to high profile events, particularly when others are arriving by car, can help signify the potential of cycling, question mobility norms, and create a unique moment for visibility.

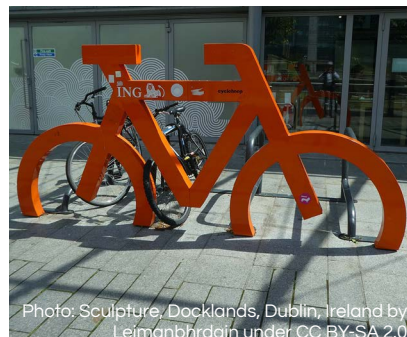
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11. Cycling Diplomacy Toolkit

Through a set of interviews, and corresponding case studies, this report makes the case for cycling as a meaningful diplomatic asset. The flexibility and utility of cycling as a tool for public diplomacy can be seen in its capacity to strengthen the brand of the Netherlands, combine with other sectors and issues, enable symbolic gestures of goodwill, promote local values and initiatives, prompt visibility and media coverage, and provide opportunities for shared experience. Given that cycling is not only synonymous with the Netherlands but also elegantly represents Dutch values of sustainability, health, liveability and egalitarianism, its potential as a diplomatic asset warrants ongoing attention and investment. Moreover, as cities throughout the world continue to grapple with growth, climate change, and transportation concerns, the value of cycling, and therefore cycling diplomacy, will continue to play a role in fostering bilateral relations. In order to support current and future efforts, the following section highlights a range of tactics to promote effective cycling diplomacy. By integrating these tactics into everyday activities or a broader strategy, cycling can play a more prominent role in strengthening relationships, building trust, and fostering cooperation.

Give a Gift:

- Gifting something temporary like a trip to the Netherlands or something more permanent like a bike rack can foster goodwill and support ongoing connection.



Create a Calendar:

- Organizing all of the national, regional, and global cycling days and campaigns can help to streamline cycling diplomacy efforts.

Organize an Event:

- Hosting an event or friendly competition can be a fantastic way to network, connect with locals, and create space for new relationships.



Showcase Cycling:

- Incorporating design elements that involve cycling, such as renaming a meeting room or hanging cycling-related posters, can serve as a conversation starter or provide a more subtle gesture about the merit of cycling.



Get a Set of Wheels:

- Having a beautiful bicycle readily available gives you something to display during meetings and bring to both cycling and non-cycling related events.



Translate Resources:

- Translating content, or making use of already translated resource like the DCE's "Dutch Cycling Vision" can allow you to reach a broader audience.

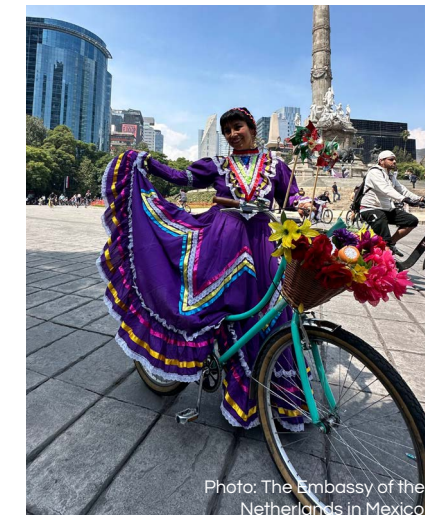


Reach out to Local Partners:

- Connecting with local cycling NGOs, government officials, and key stakeholders can be a great way to sow seeds that eventually develop into economic and technical exchange.

Go for a Ride:

- Hopping on your bike to get to work, attend meetings, or participate in events is a convenient and fun way to promote Dutch cycling culture.



Join a Ride:

- Joining an existing bike to school or bike to work ride can provide a boost to local initiatives while creating visibility for the Netherlands.



Offer a Screening:

- Documentaries about Dutch cycling culture like “Why We Cycle,” “Together We Cycle,” and “When We Cycle” give audiences a chance to learn about the Netherlands and reflect on their own experiences and assumptions.



Virtual Rides:

- Providing a virtual reality headset that takes users on a cycling journey through streets of Amsterdam is a simple and unique way for people to hear and see the beauty of Dutch cycling infrastructure.

Invite the Press:

- Inviting news outlets for media coverage can broaden awareness of cycling activities and deepen engagement with the local community.



Post when Possible:

- Whether it's LinkedIn, Instagram, X, Bluesky or Facebook, finding the appropriate social media platform is essential to furthering cycling diplomacy.



Connect with the Dutch Cycling Embassy:

An essential tactic within the toolkit of cycling diplomacy is outreach to the Dutch Cycling Embassy. The DCE is a trusted source of knowledge, serving as a translator of Dutch cycling culture and conduit for Dutch cycling expertise. Depending on the context, the DCE is able to provide resources and perspectives that can form the basis of positive diplomatic relations. By organizing study visits, cycling missions, co-sponsoring events, or connecting Dutch companies with international opportunities, the DCE can help missions and local partners to open doors, create shared experiences, and build momentum around shared goals. Through its efforts, DCE ensures that cycling, and cycling diplomacy, remains an effective mode of international connection and cooperation.

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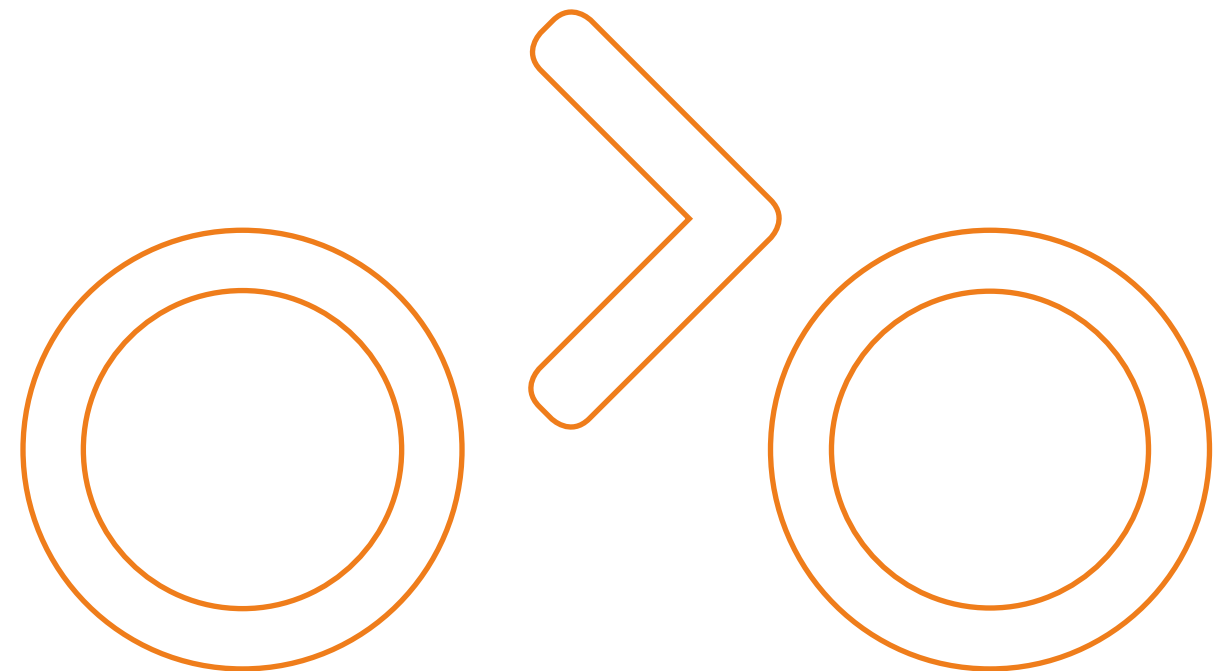
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