

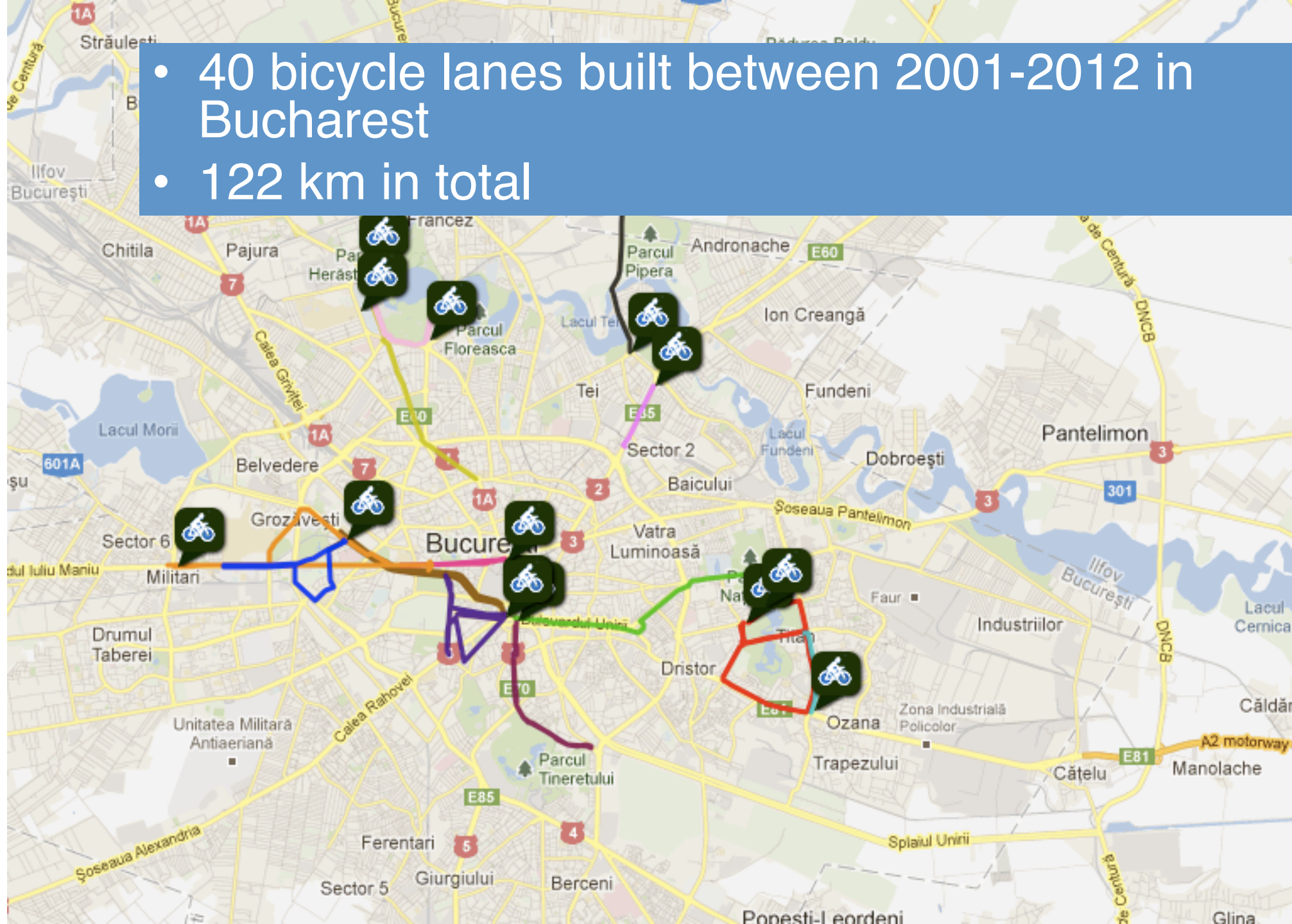


# Untold Kings of a Growing Online Bicycle Community: Converting Online Communities into Offline Critical Mass

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[www.portocalamecanica.ro](http://www.portocalamecanica.ro)

# The context

- 40 bicycle lanes built between 2001-2012 in Bucharest
- 122 km in total





# The context



- the majority are placed on the sidewalk
- currently disbanded for lack of safety

# The context

- new plans for placing the future ones AGAIN on the sidewalk.





## Current situation

- The north-south and east-west bike lane project;
- Calea Victoriei project;
- The spring arrival and the new markings on the roads – no interest for marking the bicycle lanes as well;
- The pedestrian passage under Romana Square.



## **statistics**

20%

percent of respondents of a national survey (2012) “don't use the bicycle as a means of transportation because of lack of bicycle lanes”





Material infrastructure/  
Human infrastructure

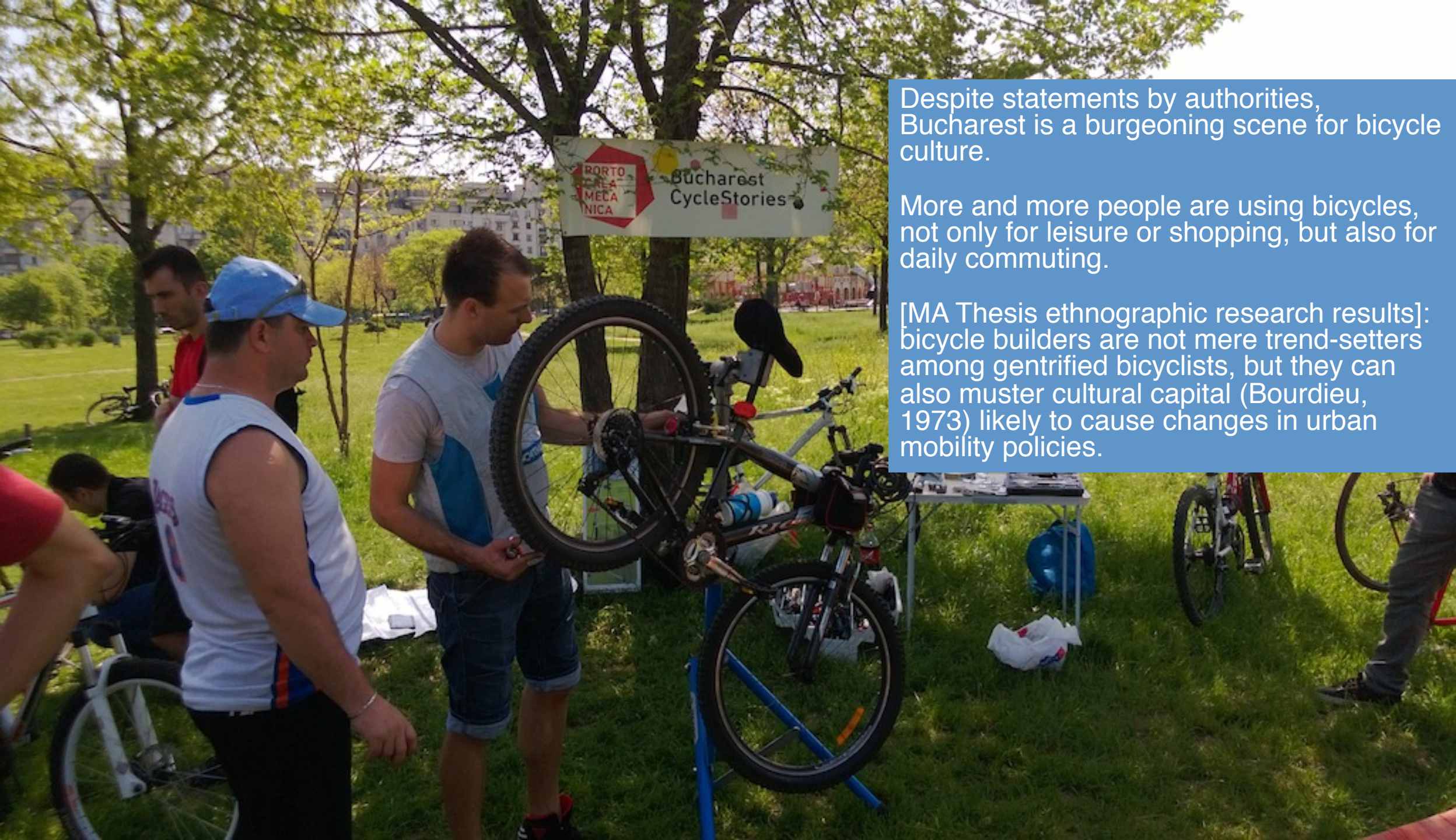




*Lugo (2012):* Human infrastructure is relational, it can build networks across the community-defined lines that physical infrastructure might reproduce.

Examples of human infrastructure in bicycling include group rides that create temporary spaces where bicycling becomes normal, online communities where riders share knowledge, shared understandings of road use, and bike repair cooperatives.





Despite statements by authorities, Bucharest is a burgeoning scene for bicycle culture.

More and more people are using bicycles, not only for leisure or shopping, but also for daily commuting.

[MA Thesis ethnographic research results]: bicycle builders are not mere trend-setters among gentrified bicyclists, but they can also muster cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) likely to cause changes in urban mobility policies.





The municipality has spent over 10 million euros for bicycle lanes, soon after taken down for being inadequate so top-down initiatives to building bicycle infrastructure in Bucharest have failed for now.

In contrast, several bottom-up initiatives are creating human infrastructure that compensate the physical one (Lugo, 2012): NGOs suing authorities, critical mass actions, internet platforms, community events, illegal alley cat races etc.







PortocalaMecanica.ro (The Clockwork Orange) is an internet platform launched in March 2009 aimed at promoting bicycle culture. It is one of the first media to address the needs of urban cyclists in Romania

It organizes several events for the community (flea markets, repair workshops, expositions, bike lessons).

Portocala Mecanica has helped bicycling becoming not only more and more visible, but also more and more part of the public agenda.





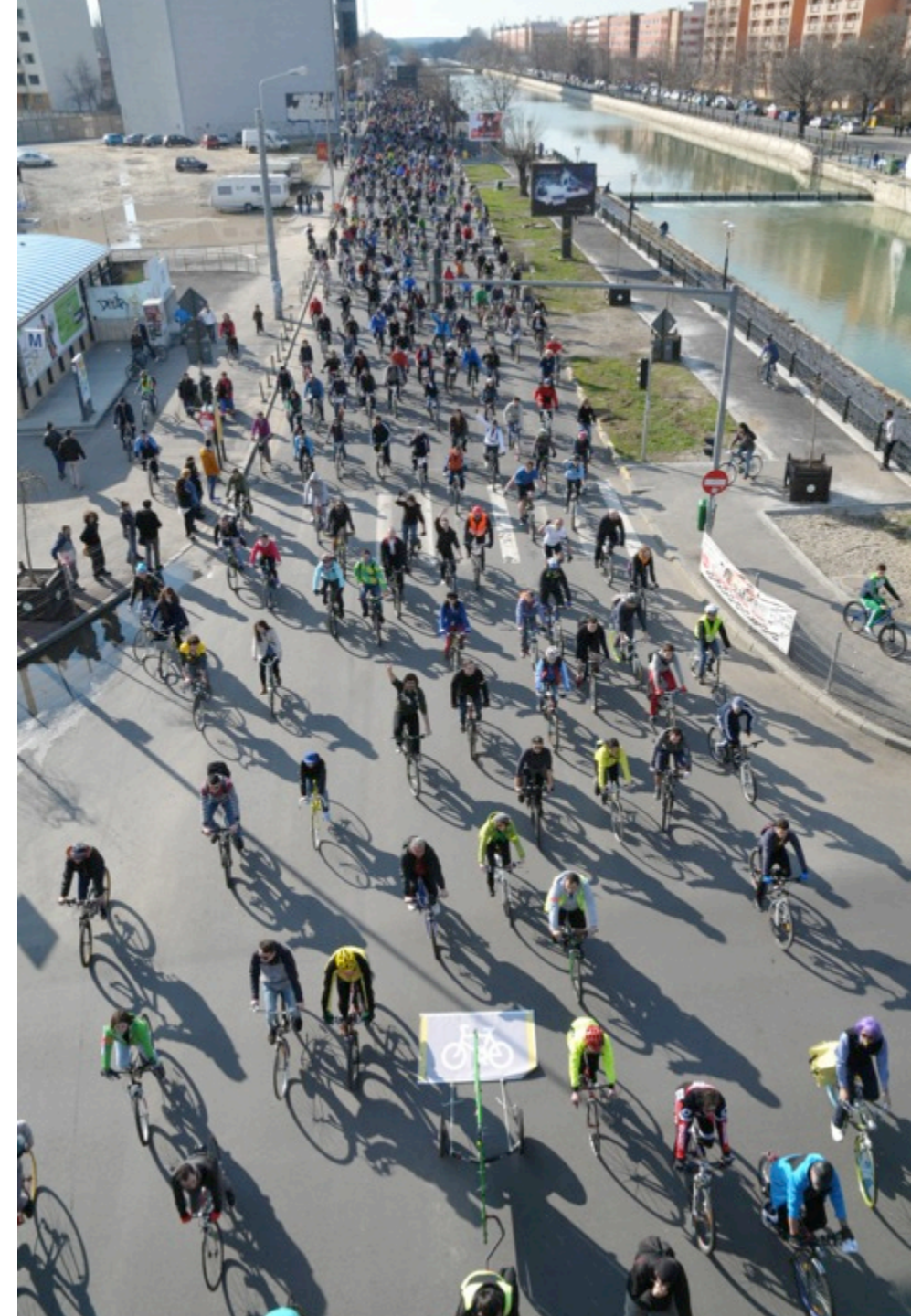


Portocala Mecanica's latest ambition was to create a national online census to get a fairer picture of our ever-growing community.

In February 2013 we launched [www.catibiciclistisuntem.ro](http://www.catibiciclistisuntem.ro) („How many cyclists are we?”) that was available for completion until the end of March.

More than 7.000 people completed our online survey.

- On the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2012, Bucharest hosted a protest in favor of bike lanes, gathering more than 1.000 participants.
- This spring, on the 23<sup>th</sup> of March, another protest was held, with more than 4.000 cyclist occupying the streets in Bucharest.
- These events are considered the biggest bicyclist gatherings in history in Bucharest. Still, the number isn't enough to beat the official ominous 1%.
- We are certainly more than that.





# in conclusion,

- Bottom-up initiatives are creating human infrastructure that compensate the physical one.
- The theory states that human infrastructure can build networks across the community-defined lines that physical infrastructure might reproduce.
- For now, municipality in Bucharest isn't paying enough attention to those initiatives in order to reproduce them. They are, though, aware of our existence and, most importantly, are starting to fear us.
- More effort needs to be put in place to unite and strengthen the community and to better co-ordinate actions such the ones mentioned so far.

**Questions?**  
Thank you!