Science, Technology and Policy for Cycling:
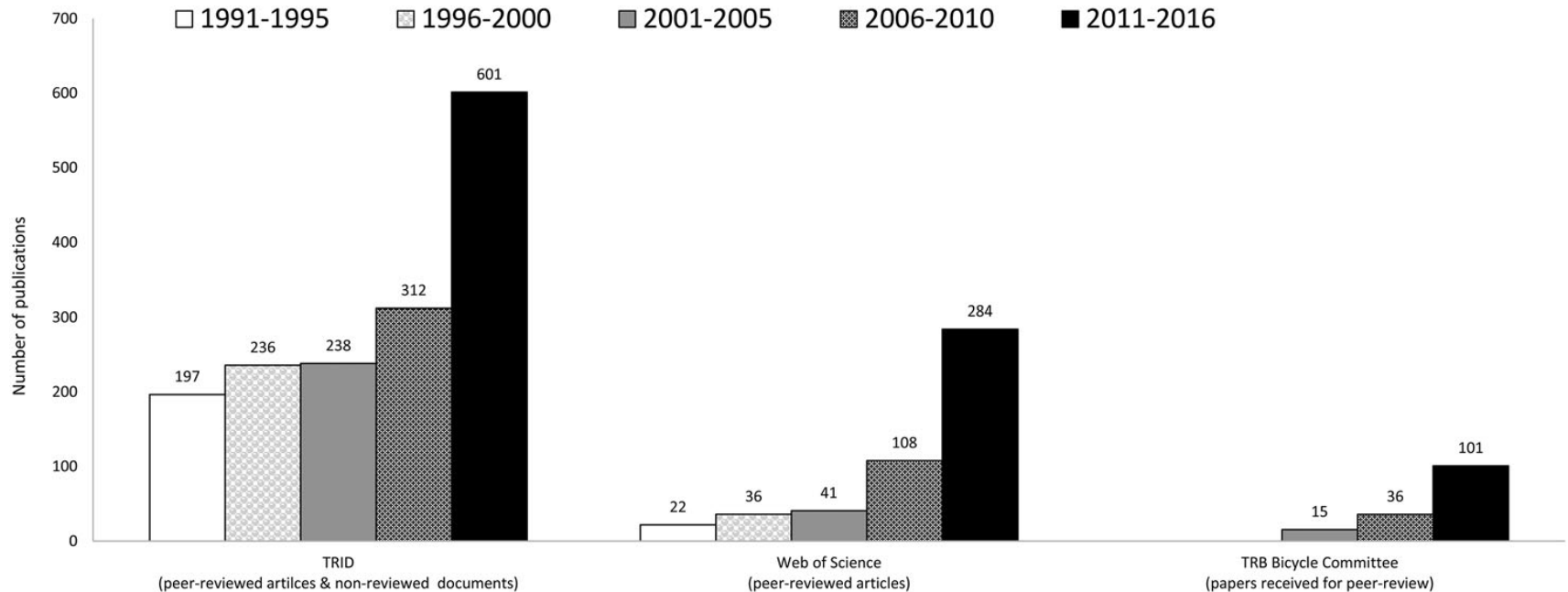# the role of academic research

University of Bologna 8/5/2019

Peter Cox

Professor of Sociology, Department of Social and Political Science, University of Chester, UK
Chair, Scientists for Cycling (for European Cyclists' Federation)
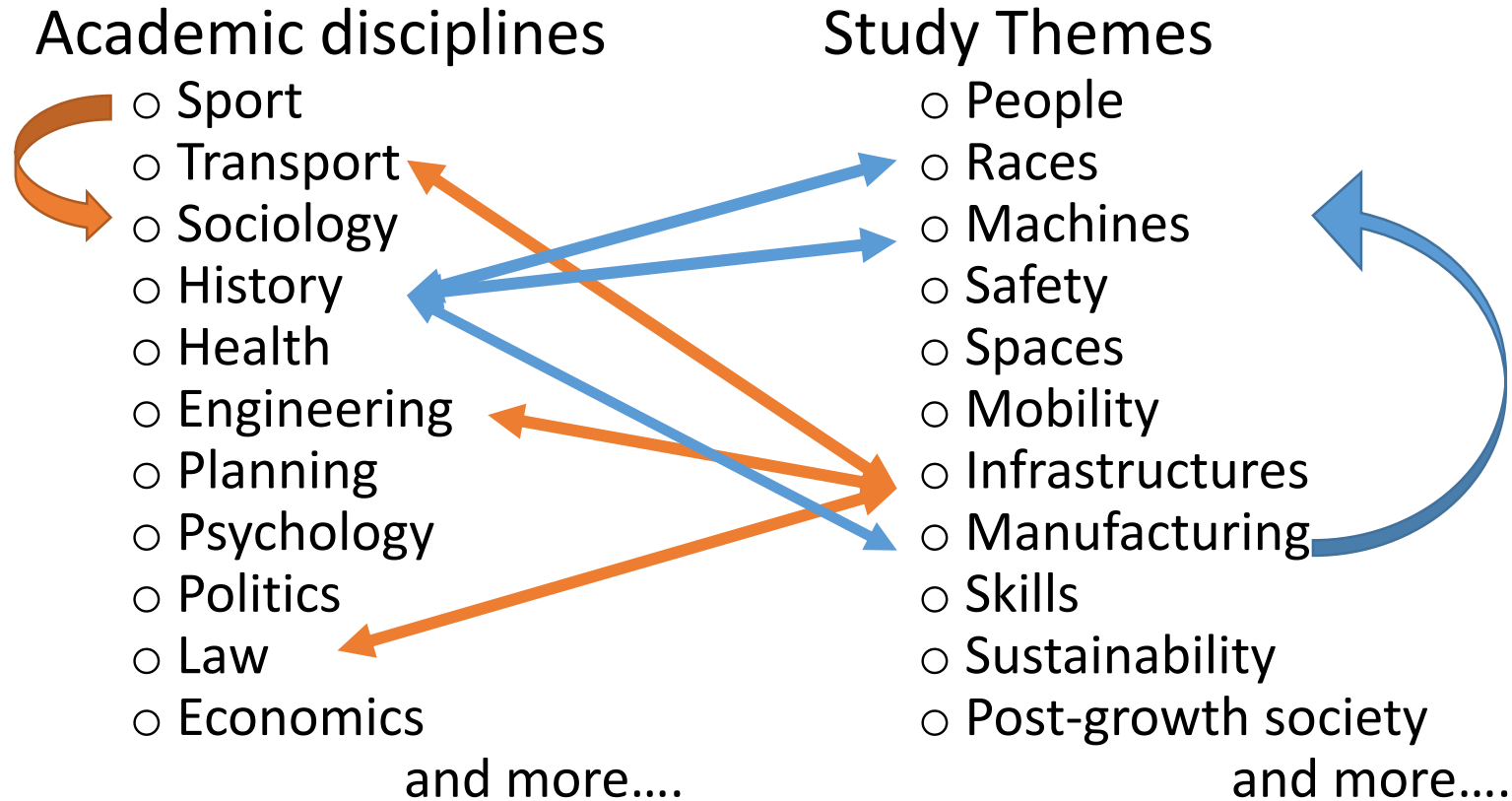
Academic research on cycling

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Building slowly…

- 1980 first International Cycling History Conference
- 2004 first Cycling and Society Symposium
- 2010 Scientists for Cycling network
- 2018 Cycling Research Network meeting
- Additional forums in Velo-City conferences and in Transport Research subgroups.

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Cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary diversity at SfC

Academic disciplines
- Sport
- Transport
- Sociology
- History
- Health
- Engineering
- Planning
- Psychology
- Politics
- Law
- Economics

and more….

Study Themes
- People
- Races
- Machines
- Safety
- Spaces
- Mobility
- Infrastructures
- Manufacturing
- Skills
- Sustainability
- Post-growth society

and more….

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Motives for research

- Unexamined desire for more cycling?

- Desire to promote cycling not wrong, but needs to be separated from research

- Proliferation of studies on **behaviour change**, making cycling safer, more attractive, extolling the health and environmental benefits, demonstrating the economic benefits

   "Where does research blur with advocacy?"

- Desire for relevance can distort research agenda

- **Even more important for advocates is academic work that might not be about cycling**

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Weaknesses in cycling research (and how to solve them)

- Over obsession with instrumentalism -
  - Imagines that research and more knowledge can produce change

- Knowledge alone does not change things
  - Evidence is vital but not decisive

- Not just a technical problem: emotions, passion and imagination are required

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Cycling…

excites passions, dreams and aspirations, creates heroes and villains
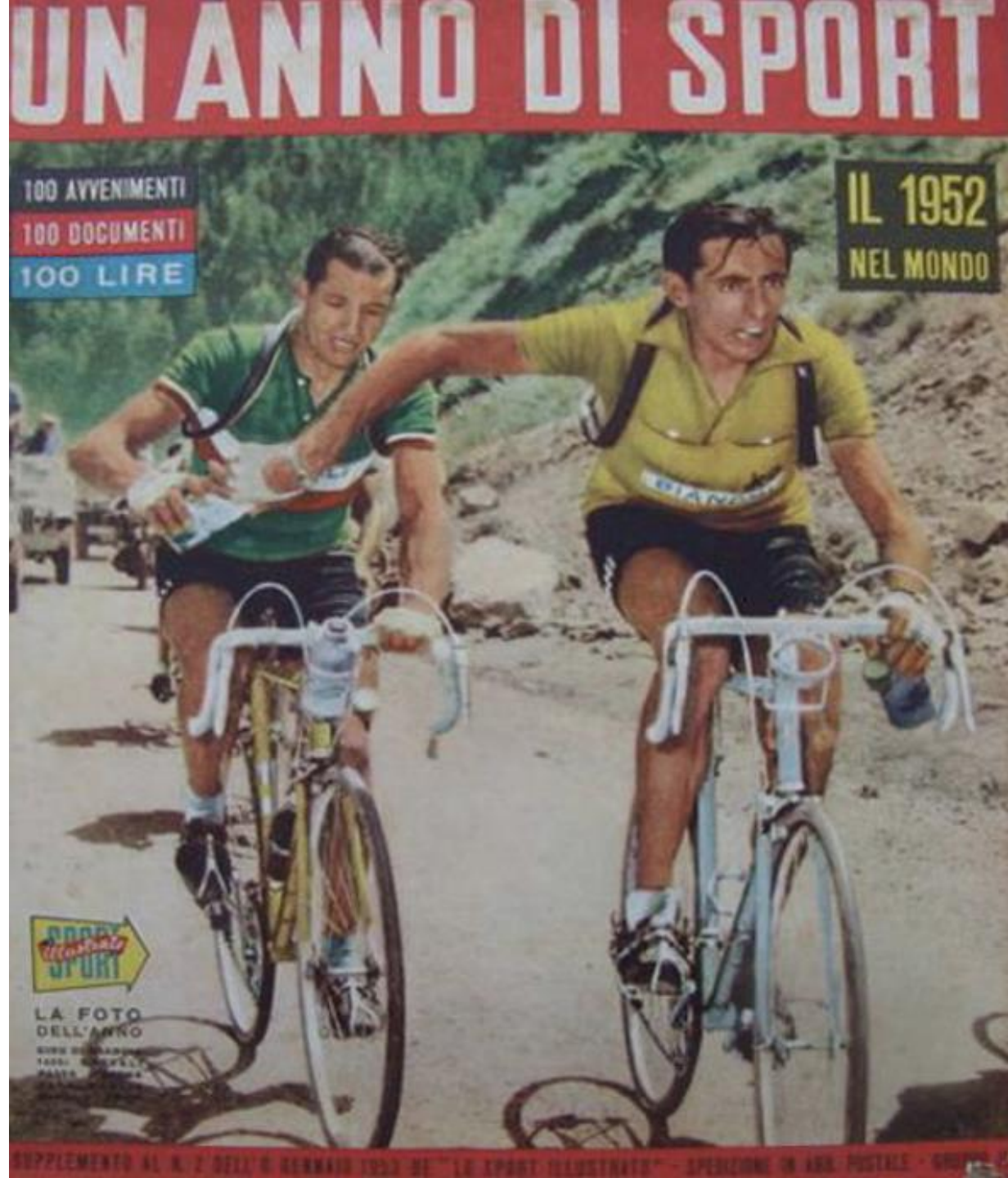
Balancing the arts and the sciences

Technical knowledge sits alongside beauty, creativity, hospitality, inclusion and justice

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"Senses Matter"

- The experiential dimension (affect) is crucial for the understanding of the desirability of practices

- Design needs to ask not only 'what works' but also 'what makes us feel welcome' or 'feel loved'

- Does our policy make us only feel 'worthy' or 'tolerated' and how do these experiences connect with the experiences of other modes of travel?

- This is not only about hard infrastructure of vehicles and spaces, but the sundries e.g. signage, connection.

- What sensory environments are we working through?

- Whose experience matters?

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Science, Technology and Policy for Cycling

- Think about the assumptions hidden in the word "cycling"

- Cycling is a complex construction (not a thing)

- Cycling as social practice comprises
    - technologies,
    - competencies
    - meanings

- Every rider ("cyclist") is an assemblage of machine, person and environment engaged in a performance shaped by social, political, economic and historical forces
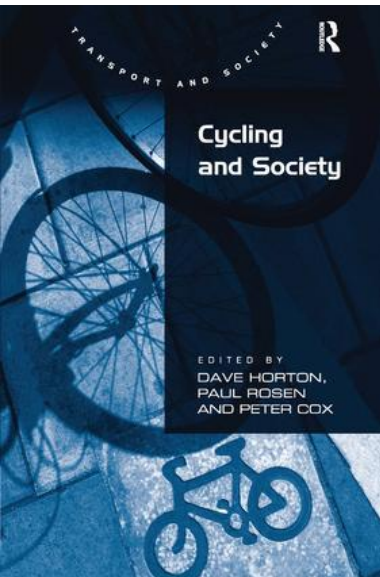
Thankyou
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