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Cycle parking as an enabler of cycling in Lisbon: User-centred design in policymaking

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Abstract

Employing design-inspired methodologies in the creation of new services is not new. But applying these in the realm of public policy is not yet a common practise. In Lisbon (Portugal), EMEL - an operating arm of the city council for mobility management - is at the forefront of public policy making by embedding novel methods in the development of urban mobility solutions. One of our latest successful experiences was the creation of a new secure cycle parking service in the city that entailed a design thinking process underpinned by a citizen-centred approach. We engaged bicycle users from the very beginning to uncover the main barriers to a more frequent use of bicycle in daily journeys around the city. Afterwards, we mapped out the pain points for parking a bicycle and co-created a solution that not only addresses user needs, as it contributes to a more seamless integrated mobility system.

Keywords: CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND CO-CREATION, PUBLIC POLICY, SECURE CYCLE PARKING, ACTIVE MOBILITY, SEAMLESS INTEGRATED MOBILITY

Introduction

Cycling has been exploited in European cities and Lisbon is no exception. The city of Lisbon is working hard to find ways to tackle the global challenge of climate change with a wide ranging strategy that encompasses not only the reduction of private vehicles in the city centre but also the promotion of more sustainable transport modes such as cycling and walking.

One of the key agents responsible for the implementation of such policies is EMEL, the municipal company for mobility and parking of Lisbon (100% owned by the City Council). EMEL manage all controlled on-street parking and over 40 car parks in the city. But in more recent years its mission has been expanding to a broader mobility management role. In particular, EMEL have evolved into an active change agent in the mobility system of Lisbon with an extended set of responsibilities, and helping the City Council delivering its strategy for sustainable mobility and managing a large number of mobility infrastructure and services (e.g. the public cycle sharing scheme).

Determined to better inform decision-making, in 2019 EMEL set up a multidisciplinary innovation team (hereinafter 'we') that brings together a variety of skills and competencies, from user research to data science, with expertise in collaborative approaches and design-inspired methodologies.

The fact of the matter is that innovation approaches have been evolving over the years, and top-down approaches have been replaced, whenever possible, for bottom-up strategies where citizens are put in the centre of the action. This translates into a more horizontal way of governance that brings together different stakeholders. The introduction of design-inspired methodologies into public policy in Lisbon has been occurring, and especially under the European project VoxPop - People, Processes & Technology towards the digital transformation of the urban mobility system of Lisbon¹ umbrella.

The work carried out under the scope of VoxPop concerning the design of a secure cycle parking

¹ Vox Pop - *People, Processes & Technology towards the digital transformation of the urban mobility system of Lisbon*, it is a project co-financed by the Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions.

49 in close relation with potential users is presented in this article. The research conducted in this
50 work had two major goals, namely:

- 51 - to better understand the bicycle use habits in Lisbon, through user routines, daily
52 concerns, family context and every dimension that impact their mobility and transport
53 choices;
- 54 - to explore how users of private bicycles were parking, what where their needs and barriers
55 that were preventing a more frequent use.

56 In recent years, the city of Lisbon has been directing its urban planning towards the inclusion of
57 active mobility helping its users to feel the city as a more liveable space. However, barriers for
58 fully embracing active mobility still exist especially when it comes to adopt cycling in daily life,
59 not just for leisure purposes. For this specific design challenge, it was also important to consider
60 the difficulty in changing the deepen-rooted habit of using private car as the main daily transport
61 mode. As such, adopting a user-centred methodology was paramount to ensure that all pain points
62 were correctly mapped, resulting in a solution that would overcome one of the main barriers
63 identified: lack of secure cycle parking facilities.

64 **Background**

65 The most recent data available concerning the daily commuting habits reveal that only 0,5% of
66 the daily trips in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA) used bicycle and 58,9% used private car
67 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, I. P, 2018). The city of Lisbon has an area of approximately
68 100 km² and nearly 550.000 inhabitants. Every day, a substantial daily commute inflow from
69 surrounding municipalities contributes to doubling the number of city users, not to mention
70 tourists which, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, represented approximately 10 million visitors a
71 year. There is a sense of urgency for the city to find ways to effectively accommodate the needs
72 of its users, namely by ensuring the proper functioning of its mobility system, one of the key
73 levers of the local economy. For the past few years, cycling has been on the top of the sustainable
74 mobility agenda of Lisbon Municipality.

75 Multiple policies and measures (P&M) leading to significant investments have been put in place
76 to promote bicycle usage, particularly as an alternative to private cars. Some of the P&M
77 implemented since 2017 by the municipality focuses on the following approaches: expanding the
78 cycling network, financial incentives to bicycle purchasing and awareness raising initiatives. The
79 municipality has also been investing on secure cycle parking facilities at pilot scale, and free on-
80 street parking solutions such as Sheffield cycle stands or car bike ports².

81 In response to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020), and while cars
82 remained parked and roads empty, Lisbon's residents started to use their bicycles for outdoor
83 exercise and regain confidence in riding a bicycle, reclaiming their space in the urban
84 environment. Following the relief of lockdown measures, it was possible to notice a willingness
85 to adopt cycling as the main transport mode, this was noticeable by the unprecedented peak of
86 bicycle demand – 500% when comparing to the previous years (Neves, 2020)- and the
87 observations made on the field by our team³ as well as in bicycle purchases, leaving stores with
88 empty shelves (DN, 2020)

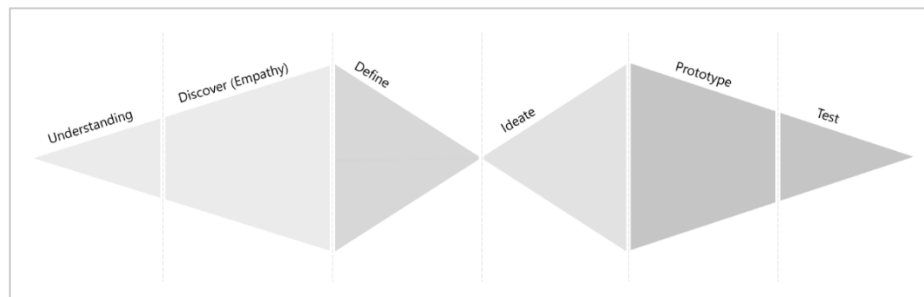
89 With various P&M in place and the window of opportunity opened by the pandemic, we realised
90 it was crucial to go deeper into studying cycling habits: understand user behaviours, triggers and
91 motivations to cycling, as well as comprehend what needs and barriers were preventing people
92 from adopting cycling as their daily transport mode. Based on previous interactions with users,
93 we were aware that the lack of secure cycle parking at the journey's start, typically someone's
94 home, was one of the most prominent aspects hindering the adoption of cycling on a daily basis.

95 **Methods and materials**

² cycle parking solution that provides for 10 bicycles in a standard on-street car parking space. The outline of a car demonstrates the space efficiency of bikes.

³ See section “Understanding user needs uncovering barriers & unmet needs”

96 The work conducted is based on the design thinking methodology (Figure 1) which can be
 97 illustrated by a double diamond. It is an iterative process, allowing to better inform the decisions
 98 and improve the solution until it reaches its final form. Additionally, it provides a collaborative/co-
 99 creative vision that allows to build a broad and robust solution for the final user.



100

101 **Figure 1 – The design thinking methodology adopted (the double diamond). Source: authors**

102 *Understanding the problem*

103 All design challenges start with a problem that must be solved. In public policy, these problems
 104 are often wicked problems⁴ (Interactive Design Organization) that by definition are ambiguous
 105 and lack clarity of their real causes. This means that while attempting to address part of the
 106 problem, one might be creating unintended problems in some other domain. Hence why the
 107 understanding phase in design thinking is fundamental to define the clear problem one is trying
 108 to address and to provide focus when navigating through the different aspects of it.

109 Aware of the magnitude of the problem at hands, we found necessary to focus on one of the
 110 aspects that were already known to be one of the causes hindering cycling adoption: lack of secure
 111 parking facilities for medium to long stay parking. To better understand the problem, we
 112 conducted an initial desk research to comprehend how other cities were tackling this challenge
 113 and benchmark solutions for cyclists. Additionally, the work included 80 flash interviews in the
 114 field, inquiring both private and shared bicycle users. The information gathered allowed a deeper
 115 understanding of how users felt about their cycling experience in Lisbon and to better comprehend
 116 the challenge at hands.

117 *Understanding user needs, uncovering barriers & unmet needs*

118 The discovery phase is an essential step “to gain an empathic understanding of the problem you
 119 are trying to solve. This involves (...), engaging and empathizing with people to understand their
 120 experiences and motivations, as well as immersing in the physical environment to gain a deeper
 121 personal understanding of the issues involved” (Interaction Design Foundation, 2020) and allows
 122 to put the research’s own assumptions apart.

123 For this study, we adopted qualitative and quantitative methods (Table 1) to explore and
 124 understand bicycle usage habits in Lisbon with users and non-users:

125
 126

Table 1 - Qualitative and Quantitative methods adopted

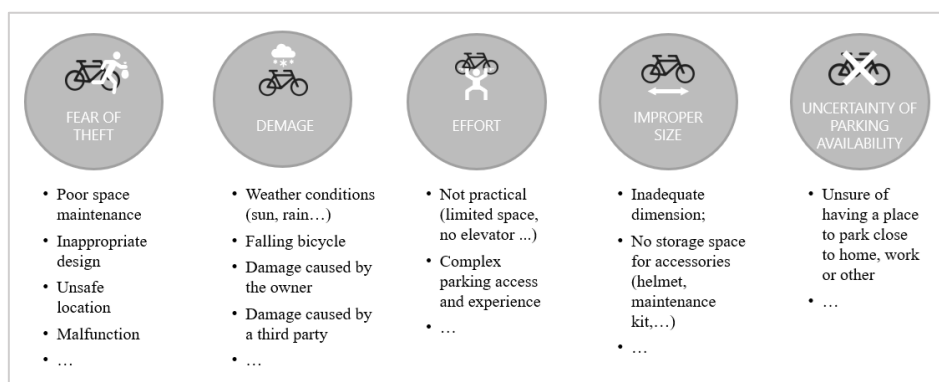
Method	Quantity	Description
Bicycle counting	2 weeks	gender, private and shared bicycles. Exploratory exercise using a simple random sampling technique

⁴ A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve—normally because of its complex and interconnected nature. Wicked problems lack clarity in both their aims and solutions and are subject to real-world constraints which hinder risk-free attempts to find a solution. Source: Interactive Design.org

In-depth interviews	6	semi-structured interviews with users of private access bicycles. Besides the aim of exploring their habits, these interviews also focused specifically on identified mapping parking issues.
Informal conversations with bicycle store owners	4	semi-structured interviews to understand market trends and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic in bicycle demand.
Online survey	463 valid responses	Lisbon's bicycle usage habits quantitative mapping, which included users and non-users. Opportunistic sampling with no statistical representativeness intended

127 (re)Define the problem

128 With a better understanding of the problem, we were ready to deep-dive on the scope of the
 129 challenge ahead. It was clear that there was a need for secure cycle parking but it was necessary
 130 to precisely map the pain points blocking the use of existing parking solutions, mainly *ad-hoc*
 131 solutions at home or public. Based on the information collected in the previous phase, it was
 132 possible to map five main pain points regarding cycle parking (Figure 2).



133

134 **Figure 2 – Pain points regarding cycle parking in Lisbon**

135 At this stage and with a well-defined scope and concrete pain points to be addressed, EMEL
 136 organised a remote workshop with several practitioners from EMEL and Lisbon’s City Council
 137 from different areas and backgrounds to spark discussion beyond the obvious solutions, gather
 138 different perspectives and possible strengths. With active facilitation exercises it was possible to
 139 go deep on each identified pain point and generate solutions for each one. It was also possible to
 140 map an initial and desire user journey both for an on-street and off-street cycle parking solution.

141 *Ideation - co-creating a concept to address unmet needs*

142 The chosen method for this phase was to conduct a series of one-on-one co-creation sessions with
 143 twelve users⁵ and an additional webinar with four extra users. The goals of these sessions were:

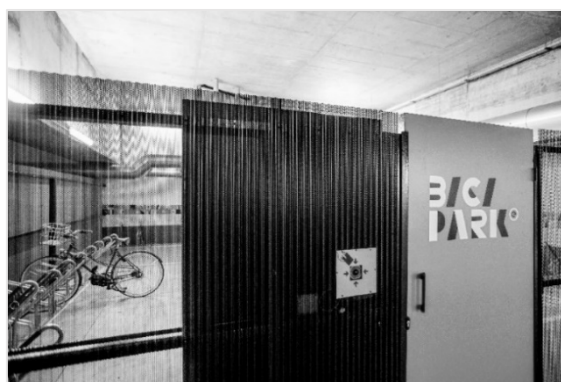
- 144 - Validate technical requirements such as material, preferred type of access, etc. -
- 145 facilitators repeatedly put the users in different scenarios by asking “*what if...*” questions;
- 146 this allowed to expand on users’ motivations and fears, and we were also able to gather a
- 147 richer knowledge of what was expected and necessary from a cycling parking solution.
- 148 - Assess price elasticity for the future service - we adapted the Van Westendorp price
- 149 sensitivity meter method (Sadwick, 2020) by introducing an extra question “*What is the*
- 150 *fair price for this service?*” as it removes the focus from the user’s own socio-economic
- 151 conditions and their own perception of added value created by the new service, and it

⁵ Due to sanitary measures in place and in order to ensure both participant and facilitators safety these sessions were hosted remotely.

152 gives an opportunity for reflection about the balance between the added value created by
 153 the new service *versus* the added value from other mobility-related services in the city
 154 - Prioritise user needs - we used an adaption of “buy a feature” co-creation game
 155 (Innovation Games, 2018). Users were given 100 coins to “purchase” a set of design
 156 aspects that we wanted to validate.

159 *Prototype, test and finetune*

160 With a clearer view on how real users would feel, act and think when interacting with the cycle
 161 parking service and its infrastructure, it was time to subject it to a real test. The first location chose
 162 to build the cycle parking facility to serve as an MVP⁷ (Figure 3) in order to test internal processes,
 163 materials and to gather the first impressions from real users and all the involved stakeholders. The
 164 first structure and its improvements were replicated into thirteen additional structures that were
 165 deployed in different city’s locations. EMEL will collect additional user feedback and sentiment
 166 towards the new service that will inform further improvements towards the service itself (pricing,
 167 bundle with other mobility products, etc) as well as to prioritise additional features.



168
 169 **Figure 3 - The MVP that was also repurposed for a fully functioning cycle parking facility**

170 **Data and results**

171 *Cycle parking service*

172 The online survey gave a clearer view of cycling habits as frequency of use, duration of journeys,
 173 safety and satisfaction levels.⁸
 174 As for the co-creation phase the main conclusions are presented in Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4.

175

176 **Table 2 - Users’ feedback towards access control requirements**

Access control		
Address pain points	Hypotheses	User feedback
Theft Effort	Key/Card Access	90% of participants choose a simple key or a contactless card solution for access. Food for thought: Fear of losing their card. One extra item to carry. Not as practical as mobile phone.

⁷ Minimal viable product

⁸ The research study will be published during 2021.

	Mobile application	The app is an instinctive response, but after a reflection exercise, users identified more disadvantages than advantages compared to a contactless card-based solution: - Risk of running out of battery in the cell phone; - Limited data allowances; - Reduced mobile coverage.
	User identification	All users agreed that identification was inevitable: important to know who enters the facility.
	User authentication (add on to identification)	Users recognise it would provide greater security. However, is not valued as it considered an unnecessary and inconvenient additional step.

177 Proposed solution based on user feedback: contactless card access assigned to a specific user:
 178 Given that the identification of who would enter the facility would not be possible with a typical
 179 key, the proposed option consisted of a personalised contactless card that would allow to record
 180 who accesses the cycle parking facility.

181 **Table 3 – Users’ feedback towards infrastructure requirements**

Structure		
Address pain points	Hypotheses	User feedback
Theft Effort Damage	Opaque enclosure	Although it discourages theft, users mentioned some disadvantages: - claustrophobic space - compromises the safety of those inside.
	See-through enclosure (semi-opaque or grid)	Most of the users mentioned they would feel safer and more comfortable with this option

182 In order to address the fears of beginner bicycle users and for being a versatile solution (usable in
 183 cycle park in a structure park as on the public road) the proposed solution based on user feedback
 184 was to use perforated metal mesh with an open area below 30%.

185 **Table 4 - Users’ feedback towards other security features**

Other security features		
Address pain points	Hypotheses	User feedback
Theft Effort	Car park operator	Users consider that: the more forms of surveillance, the better is the solution. However, the possibility of being only controlled by the car park operator was generally considered, albeit imperfect, as enough.
	Video surveillance inside the bicycle facility	Video surveillance inside the cycle park was not particularly valued ("it feels too much").
	Video surveillance outside the cycle facility, facing its door	This hypothesis was very well received and considered to be the fittest. Some users would not trust the system as it is prone to be tampered with.

186 Proposed solution based on user feedback: the cycle park location in off-street parking facilities
 187 is key. Ensuring that the cycle park is located in sight line of the already existing security systems
 188 is crucial to ensure security as well as ensuring that the entrance door is installed in the operator's

189 cabin viewing angle.

190 *Cycle parking access control system of the facility*

191 The access system should be easy to use and simple to manage and the system's peripherals should
192 not be a block for service scalability. As such, the access card should be widely available and the
193 reader should be easily procured. The preferred solution was to use a combo of an already existing
194 system (VIVA system, a Calypso-based solution⁹) and a reader that would account for service
195 scalability and future adaptability towards virtual ticketing. The access system should also
196 account for a seamless integrated mobility platform, that although not in use at this time, will be
197 the norm in the upcoming years. We also accounted for other factors when sourcing for the right
198 combo of technologic systems and peripherals:

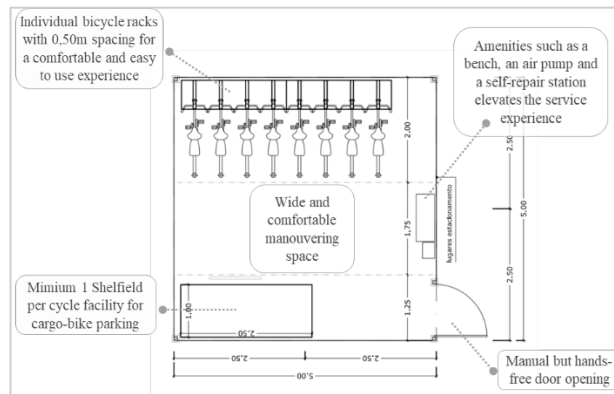
- 199 ✓ **Integration and seamlessness** – The Metropolitan Transport Company of Lisbon (TML)
200 a company managed at a regional level by the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon (AML)
201 manage the ticketing system at the metropolitan level and operates the VIVA system,
202 currently shared by 27 operators. Whilst at this time our service has not achieved fare
203 integration, a significant step towards seamlessness has been taken with the adoption of
204 the same contactless card (as to become a cycle parking client, the person must own a
205 VIVA card and load the monthly pass in it).
- 206 ✓ **Standardisation and interoperability** – The VIVA System is Calypso ticketing system
207 based on open standards for the actors of mobility ecosystem. It is a secure,
208 interoperable, open and flexible ecosystem which allows transport and mobility operators
209 to use the same compatibly and interoperable technology, using a common Data Model
210 and embedded API. The adoption of an open standards, already in use by the mobility
211 ecosystem of Lisbon enables the interoperability at national and European levels.
212 As for the card reader, the equipment installed is in fact a contactless smart terminal
213 module capable of managing all ticket media (physical and digital), prepared for a
214 potential future smart ticketing development (e.g. pay-as-you-go or virtual wallet). The
215 service is also easily scalable as the readers are prepared for outdoor conditions, allowing
216 for future cycle facilities to be easily deployed in on-street parking spaces.
- 217 ✓ **Technology agnostic** – The access system is also future-proof as all possible future
218 evolutions are already accounted for: it is adaptable to new access types (debit cards,
219 mobile applications, QR codes, etc) as the reader is able to manage all digital tickets:
220 closed-loop cards (Mifare®, Desfire®...), NFC devices, contactless tickets, mobile apps
221 (through Bluetooth) and the open payment terminals can handle all kinds of future
222 ticketing media and new transport applications. A standard service can easily become into
223 a hyper-personalisation one, where the specific user needs are accounted for.
- 224 ✓ **Inclusive** – The user-research study pointed us to a card-based solution, as such, we chose
225 the VIVA card, a card that most Lisbon's residents already possess being the go-to card
226 for mobility in Lisbon serving several operators in the city. This way, only a minority of
227 users will have to acquire an additional card. Low digital literacy segments and lower
228 socio-economics segments will have the same degree of access as the access system will
229 not require additional costs to the end user and users will not rely on a digital solution to
230 adhere and use the service.

231 *Cycle parking facility design*

232 A tailor-made solution (instead of an off-the-shelf solution) was adopted, not only to meet users'
233 pains and needs but also to accommodate the variability of implantation areas, restricted by
234 pre-existing parking bays that needed to be converted into cycle parking facilities. This option
235 allowed for customisations (Figure 4) such as the creation of bi-directional aisles with at least
236 1,75m wide and the installation of individual bicycle supports. These features and a closed facility

⁹ Calypso is an open standard for electronic ticketing deployed by transit operators to ensure seamless integration and support global interoperability.

237 were design to ensure a secure and comfortable place to park a bicycle for medium to long stays.



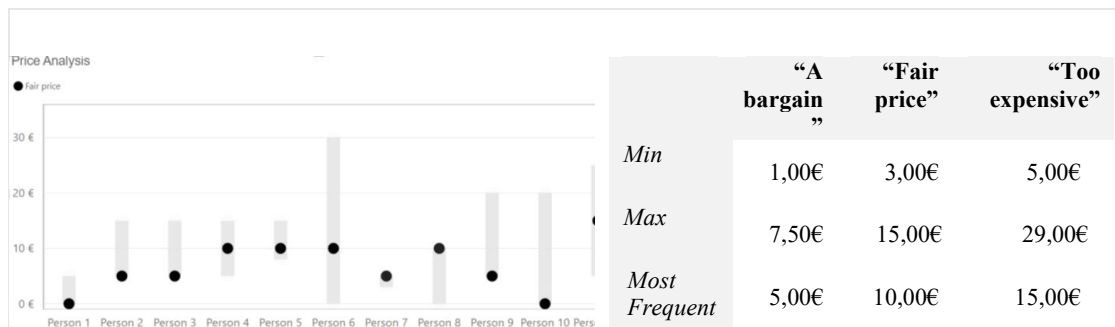
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Figure 4 - Cycle parking facility blueprint. Source: EMEL

240 *Price elasticity testing results*

241 As for the price elasticity testing (Sadwick, 2020) the results gave an interval between 6,5€ and
 242 10€ per month as a comfortable price range for the proposed service. Being 10€ the most frequent
 243 response for a “fair price”. However, when setting a price in public services it is necessary to
 244 guarantee that no segment is excluded from a particular service. Also, public services tend to be
 245 not-for-profit but value-driven to address a specific public need. For these reasons, the final price
 246 for this service was set between the “a bargain” price point and the “fair price” price point.
 247 Companies aiming for profit in their services, usually set the price point between the questions
 248 “At what price is this service too expensive that you won’t even consider using?” and the “At
 249 what price this service begins to seem expensive?” as to maximise earnings.

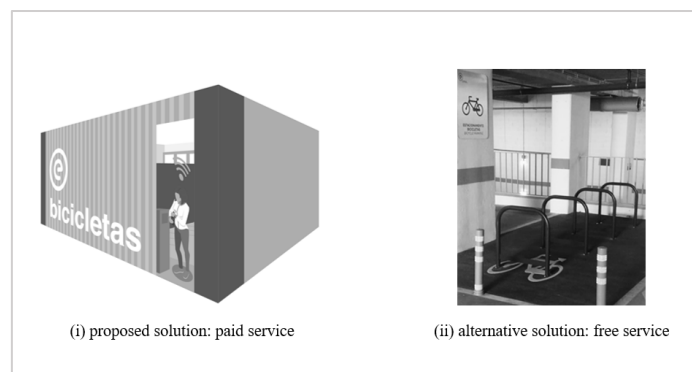


250 **Figure 5 – left: price assessment (grey vertical lines depict the declared price range from ‘a bargain’**
 251 **and ‘too expensive’, black dots signal the declared ‘fair price’); right: summary of results**

252 *Results of the prioritisation of features exercise*

253 The results from this dynamic were very similar, which gave us confidence of which features
 254 should be prioritised: (i) the need for user identification when accessing the cycle parking facility
 255 was chosen in 6/16¹⁰ participants (ii) following by the need for a hands-free door (6/16). Only
 256 two users (participants from the webinar – a non-exploratory session) preferred to have an
 257 individual locker instead of the proposed community shared space validating that a restricted but
 258 shared cycle parking facility was the best option. For further validation of the proposed enclosed
 259 solution and its main features, it was shown to the co-creation session’s participants two parking
 260 solutions: (i) the proposed one that was a paying service and (ii) a free service that merely
 261 consisted of Sheffield cycle stands without any additional security or amenities features. Only 1
 262 in 12 participants, chose the free option.

¹⁰ 12 participants from the co-creation sessions plus 4 from the webinar



263

264 **Figure 6 – Illustration of 2 parking solutions tested with users: a paid service and a free service**

265 *Surprising discoveries from the research study*

266 Personal safety versus bicycle security

267 The fear of theft was one of the strongest pain points referred by users in our initial research.
268 However, in the one-on-one co-creation sessions, it was clear that there was also a concern about
269 user's own safety. This aspect is more prominent when talking about parking a bicycle in an off-
270 street parking facility, where vehicle and people movement is lower or non-existent. For this
271 reason, we designed a cycle parking facility that would take in consideration both bicycle security
272 as well as ensuring that the user felt safe when using the service by creating a spacious and well-
273 illuminated facility privileging locations closed to pedestrian exits and ensuring an access control
274 system that would register who enters the cycle parking facility.

275 Mobile application versus access card

276 During the one-on-one co-creation sessions, it was noticeable that a mobile application was the
277 most immediate solution in users minds when accessing the cycle parking facility. However, when
278 on further reflection a great part of users did not want to have this as their only option when
279 accessing the cycle parking facility. Being dependent on a mobile device to access their means of
280 transportation and the fear of technical issues occurring were some of the concerns raised by a
281 large part of the users (regardless of the users age group). In the buy-a-feature game, only 1 in 16
282 users chose a mobile application against 6 in 16 users that chose an access card and a hands-free
283 door as their top priority when interacting with the cycle parking service, proving that when
284 comparing with other service aspects a mobile application is not a priority. This discovery was
285 just one of the most prominent examples that demonstrates that technology is a mean and not an
286 end as technology should serve the community and not the other way around.

287 *Limitations of the study*

288 Remote participatory research: the delivery of this phase took place during the first wave of
289 COVID-19, in 2020. It was a great challenge to conduct a participatory methodology in this period
290 when most people were working from home. To this end, we had to adapt most approaches (except
291 flash interviews) to the digital space.

292 Fortunately, technological challenges were easily overcome both by us and the users and, due to
293 the interactive / learning from experience of the process, it could effectively lose a certain depth
294 collection of information (due to the impossibility of physically visiting usual user parking, for
295 example). Nonetheless, we believe this kind of information was gathered over various stages of
296 the project.

297 **Conclusions**

298 The design challenge started with understanding the habits of bicycle users in the city of Lisbon
299 and identifying the barriers and unmet needs preventing a more frequent use of bicycles. Through

300 an exploratory journey we were able to validate that the lack of secure cycle parking for medium
301 to long stay parking was a big barrier to wider bicycle adoption. The whole process was supported
302 by several methods used in user-research and service design that bring the user to the centre of
303 the design process. The conclusions drawn from the whole process enabled EMEL to create a
304 network of thirteen cycle parks (first phase) installed throughout Lisbon. The first results of the
305 service launch validate, once again, the need of these type of solutions. Due to its success, EMEL
306 is already in the process of expanding the service to other locations in the city. This project also
307 gave us a range of new insights on innovative and participative projects:

308 *Innovation does not need to be disruptive* - innovation can take up the form of incremental
309 advancements in practices, such as in public policymaking. By meaningfully engaging users and
310 allowing them to voice their views directly, we were able to have a deeper insight that otherwise
311 would not have been accessible to inform decisions and ensuring that public policies are
312 effectively aligned with user needs. This is especially true when trying to understand and change
313 preconceived ideas that people have regarding how they interact with urban space and mobility
314 habits. The design challenge was not about creating a cutting-edge solution nor digitising an
315 existing one, the goal was to remove existing barriers for adopting cycling as frequent commuting
316 mode, while taking a step forward towards a more seamless integrated mobility. True innovation
317 occurs when change is beneficial and successful, and not necessarily technological. In this
318 particular design, we selected technologies that serve both the current needs of users (using an
319 access card instead of a mobile application) and that accounts for user needs and the vision for
320 the city intended.

321 *Participatory process to reach solutions adapted to real needs* - design thinking is a widely spread
322 methodology in the private sector and it has been used greatly across industries. We chose to use
323 this methodology which was received with enthusiasm and great adoption from the several
324 stakeholders. This allowed for the process to be quick and sharp avoiding the possible burden of
325 bureaucracy, budget constraints and organisation complexity. Also, involving the user from day
326 one brought dynamism to the design process, challenging preconceived ideas and made us feel
327 accountable to the end-user.

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334

335 **Disclaimer**

336 This paper was written for the purpose of sharing the knowledge generated with the wider
337 community. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of EMEL's innovation
338 team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission nor of the Urban
339 Innovation Actions Initiative.

340

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