
Cassiope Sydoriak

Broken Spoke Bike Co-operative

Age: 25

Education: University of Colorado at Boulder; BA in Art History & BA Anthropology, University of Oxford; MSc History of Art

Background: Overseas Student

University: Graduated

Area of Interest: Bike riding, repair and sustainable transport

Although we interviewed Cassiope, she wanted to emphasise that her project is a collaborative effort (being a Co-operative) and mentioned her co-founders Eleanor Smith (bike mechanic) and William McCallum (PhD student in social sculpture at Oxford Brookes).

Cassiope was an Undergraduate at the University of Colorado. Upon finishing her Degree she wasn't sure what she wanted to do next, so she started volunteering at a bike shop in Colorado. This was where she found her love of riding and fixing bikes. It led to a complete change in her life:

"It was an experience of focusing attention on one specific detailed task at a time, experiencing the city in a refined & detailed way, and it encouraged me to meet people, brought together by our love of bikes."

Since then, Cassiope has completed a Masters Degree in the History of Art at the University of Oxford, which brought her into contact with her co-founders in Oxford. In addition to being a hobby she loves, Cassiope also emphasised the sustainable transport aspect of her project, and the environmental impact, in terms of reducing car journeys.

The project started out with a fortnightly workshop to encourage women to ride and maintain bikes, particularly as women are often excluded from activities such as mechanical maintenance. The workshop itself is designed to encourage people to become more efficient in bike mechanics and riding, and encourages people to attend (for a small fee), to receive advice and help from volunteer mechanics (many of whom work in bike shops).

"We aim to have a welcoming atmosphere – based on enjoying tasks and learning, not profit."



Wherever possible, they try not to repair bikes for people, but rather show people how to repair them for themselves. They offer a range of courses, which vary in length from 3 to 9 hours (with varying fees). The Co-operative also offers cycle confidence training for adults and adolescents.

Setting up the Co-operative has not been without its challenges however. As Cassiope is a US citizen, she needed to apply for a graduate entrepreneurial visa, a challenging process which required submitting a business plan to the University. Although difficult, this helped to make their plan concrete.

In addition, the Co-operative want to offer public workshops 2 days a week, but need to find more qualified mechanics with friendly public engagement skills. They have volunteers, but retaining them can be difficult.

There are success stories too though. For example, attendees at some of their workshops have included vulnerably housed people, one of whom was very keen and ended up attending the whole advanced bike mechanics course. He is now a volunteer, and is going to get accreditation as a bike mechanic, part funded by the homelessness charity Crisis.

In the future, the Co-operative hopes to expand to be able to run workshops in other nearby towns and villages in Oxfordshire, such as Bicester.

They would also like to work more with schools and young people, particularly because they wish

to engage with people to encourage them to ride a bike before learning to drive a car.

Website: <http://bsbcoop.org/>

Twitter: @BrokenSpokeCoop

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BrokenSpokeBikeCoop?fref=ts>

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