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Bicycle Boom of 1890s in Ukrainian Lands: Local Mobilities between Imperial Politics

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The first comparative study of the 1890s Bicycle Boom in Ukrainian lands, at that point part of the Habsburg and Romanov Empires, introduces a world of bicycle producers, retailers, advocates, consumers and riders. It focuses on local agency in adopting Western technologies. A comparison of bicycle clubs in Ukrainian lands of the two empires illustrates how distinct imperial ethnic, social and gender politics influenced the social construction of bicycle use. The article presents a scenario of technological progress in which local enthusiasts were key drivers of innovation, while the states responded with regulatory measures rather than commissioned technological change. Although Eastern Europe was late in launching its own bicycle mass-production, the cultural phenomenon of the 1890s Bicycle Boom, with its enthusiasm, public debate and new standards of bodily performance, took place at the same time as in bicycle-producing Western societies.