



Cycling & Cycle Tourism in Europe
Interview with the President of the European Cyclists' Federation
A strategic conversation on infrastructure, data, inclusivity and governance.
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Editorial note This interview is part of BikeTourism.org's editorial work aimed at exploring the role of cycling and cycle tourism within European policies, territorial development and sustainable mobility strategies. The interview is published both as an editorial article and as this downloadable document intended for policymakers, destination managers, tourism operators and researchers.

1. **In the ECF article “5 Cycling Tourism Trends in 2026”, cycle tourism is presented as a mature and strategic sector.**

Why do you think 2026 represents a turning point for cycle tourism in Europe?

For a number of years now we have seen a consumer trend towards more active and more sustainable tourism. People are looking for more calm, off-the-beaten-track and authentic experiences. This will hopefully be reflected in the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy which we expect in the spring of this year.

Technological developments, in particular “agentic” AI, will start making a big impact in helping people overcome the many practical barriers to planning and experiencing cycling tourism. Planning a longer cycling trip currently presents substantial logistical challenges which so far have prevented or discouraged people from undertaking the trips they would really want to make. The rollout of Agentic AI will make planning of cycling trips or holidays a lot easier. Thus it will make cycling tourism more accessible for more people, but only if tourism professionals and organisations provide reliable, retrievable and accurate information.

2. **ECF often refers to cycling as a system rather than a standalone activity.**

What does this shift mean in practice for European, regional and local policy-making?

Mobility is a central tenet of human civilisation. Cycling is part of the fabric that holds our societies together and functioning, connecting people and places in an accessible and sustainable manner. This means that at all levels (European, national, regional and local) cycling should be integrated in economic and social policies across disciplines, including health, housing, planning, transport, environmental and industrial policy.

3. **The article highlights the importance of infrastructure quality over quantity.**

What are the most common mistakes regions should avoid when investing in cycle tourism infrastructure?

The most common mistakes are insufficient quality in terms of rideability, road safety, connectivity, attractiveness and accessibility. It is extremely important that infrastructure connects places where people wish or need to travel from or to. They must feel able to do so in a comfortable and safe manner.

4. **Bike–train integration is identified as a key trend for 2026.**

How critical is rail accessibility for the future growth of long-distance and cross-border cycle tourism?

Long-distance cycle tourism requires that prospective tourists are able to reach the start/end of their trip in a sustainable manner. **With their bicycle!** Hence rail accessibility is crucial. See also our most recent report [Cyclists Love Trains](#)

5. **Digital tools and reliable information are increasingly central to the cycling experience.**

What role do data, mapping and digital platforms play in building trust and usability for cycle tourists?

Availability of accurate data on mapping tools, on [eurovelo.com](#) and on national or regional cycling tourism websites is crucial. When planning, aspiring cycling tourists need to know about the rideability and the safety of the route, depending on their specific needs. The same applies to information about the accessibility of essential services (accommodation, food, public transport). See also the answer to question 1.

6. **Inclusivity is a growing focus in ECF's work.**

How can cycling and cycle tourism become more accessible to families, older people and less experienced cyclists?

The bicycle industry plays an important role, affordable electric bicycles and increasingly producing bicycles for people who for whatever reason cannot ride a "regular" two-wheeled bicycle. There is also an increasing number of people who use their bicycle as a personal mobility aide. Now it's time for authorities to step up and make bicycle infrastructure accessible to non-standard types of bicycles (three-wheelers, trailers, rickshaws, handbikes). This includes sufficiently wide cycling infrastructure, removal of obstacles (bollards, chicanes, steps) and providing bicycle parking and public transport facilities for special bicycles, similarly as for other mobility aides (wheelchairs!).

7. **EuroVelo is often described as the backbone of European cycle tourism.**

What needs to happen next to fully unlock its economic and territorial potential?

EuroVelo already IS the backbone of European cycling tourism. EuroVelo provides a governance structure for international cross-border cycle routes. EuroVelo has set a quality standard for touristic or recreational cycle routes, provides evaluation and certification tools and provides guidance for future route development at different levels. The EuroVelo route network overlaps and connects national and regional networks.

8. **Cycle tourism is increasingly linked to regional and rural development.**

Which data or indicators are most convincing today when engaging policymakers and funding authorities?

Unfortunately we still have insufficient data on the economic impact of cycling tourism at the regional, national and European level. However older research suggests that (in all of Europe together) the economic impact of cycling tourism is at least as big as that of the entire cruise-tourism sector. More recent data from Italy, Germany and the Netherlands seem to support this. The big difference between cycling tourism and other forms is that the benefits are thinly spread over entire countries and regions, instead of being limited to tourist hot-spots such as Venezia, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik or Barcelona. In that sense cycling tourism may also help combat over-tourism.

9. **Local operators and services are essential to the cycling tourism ecosystem.**

How can EU-level strategies better support local ecosystems, not only national frameworks?

The next EU budget cycle (2027-2034) should implement the European Declaration on Cycling (2024), which explicitly includes commitments to support cycling tourism and recreational cycling. In particular, European strategies should strengthen multimodal connectivity, improve cycling infrastructure and create generally favourable conditions for cycling tourism. This will stimulate regional economic development and sustainable tourism options across Europe.

10. **Looking ahead to 2026, what three concrete actions should Europe prioritise to strengthen cycling and cycle tourism in a lasting and coordinated way?**

The European Cyclists' Federation has just launched the **Active Tourism Coalition**, which has identified the following key Priorities for Policy Action:

1. Recognition and integration

Active tourism should be recognised as a cornerstone of sustainable tourism policy. This includes integrating cycling, walking, and hiking into destination mobility strategies, multimodal transport

planning, and last-mile solutions, alongside better monitoring of social, environmental, and economic impacts.

2. Brand Europe and visibility

Europe's extensive network of long-distance routes — such as EuroVelo, greenways, E-paths, and GR footpaths — should be showcased internationally as symbols of Europe's natural and cultural heritage. This effort should be supported by open, high-quality data within EU tourism data hubs, and by recognising certification schemes and training programmes that ensure quality and sustainability.

3. Integrated governance

Delivering successful active tourism requires collaboration. The coalition calls for integrated governance frameworks that bring together local communities, destination management organisations, tourism operators, NGOs, land managers, transport providers, media, and outdoor sport organisations, ensuring tourism development protects landscapes while benefiting residents.

4. Investment and funding

Active tourism should be prioritised in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), with dedicated investment in long- and short-distance cycling routes, hiking trails, and cross-border tourism infrastructure.

Credits Interviewee: Henk Swarttouw, President – European Cyclists' Federation

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