Safe cycling: Learning lessons among CIVITAS MOBILIS cities

In one of the CIVITAS MOBILIS project measures implemented in Ljubljana, participants at the workshop regarding cycling racks identified safety as a key issue for supporting the citizens to choose cycling as their mobility mode. Nothing new, someone would say. However it was a revelation for many that cycling, safety and public engagement are going hand in hand. Health issue as a trigger for cycling is not good enough – nobody can expect citizens to cycle if primary level of safety is not achieved. Basically that means to provide space for cycling in the urban areas – and that can be done on numerous different ways.

This bulletin is providing an overview of cycling safety presentations, made by the representatives from the participating cities (Ljubljana, Odense, Toulouse, Venice) at the December 2006 Technical Workshop organized in the scope of the CIVITAS MOBILIS project. Presentations were followed by the round-walk through Ljubljana city centre aiming to familiarize participants with the selected hot spots and conflict situation caused by parking on the cycling lanes. The third part in form of the working groups was aimed at mutual learning among participating cities on selected safety issues.

Workshop was also an opportunity for critical reflection to identified safety issues in terms of governance and coordination for improving the situation. On issues like:

- Parking prohibition at cycling paths is rarely enforced
- Lack of dedicated infrastructure, bottlenecks and sudden breaks
- Traffic regulations for cyclists and routing often unclear
- Neither fish nor fowl: Sometimes considered with motorists, sometimes with pedestrians
- Lack of understanding on cyclists’ issues within councils and police

However there are many advantages of cycling

- Cycling is healthy – it reduces considerably the risk of heart diseases
- The bicycle is the ultimate clean and silent vehicle. It consumes only renewable fuels and is very energy efficient
- Cycling is cheap – both vehicles and infrastructures cost only fractions of motorised modes
- Cycling is space-saving – no multi-lane expressways or multi-storey car park are required
- It can be combined perfectly with other modes

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Odense

Odense is considered as a champion city regarding cycling. Its modal split is showing that 26% of all trips at the municipality level are done by cycling, meaning more than 50% in central Odense. In the last 30 years City of Odense has introduced many measures to achieve such modal split. Odense today is still working on several safety issues for cycling. These measures are:

- New speed regulation for cyclists in connection with green wave,
- Introduction of new signs (information) for cyclists,
- Safety of cyclists at intersections,
- New regulation for trucks at intersections,
- Introduction of special chips against thefts of bikes,
- Additional incentives for family cycling (parents escorting children to school), and
- Training programmes for children.

After initiation of the green wave for cyclists, more than half of them experienced an improvement and more than 2/3 want more of this. Cause is lying in the fact, that red lights are demotivating the cyclist. In addition to that the issue of "green wave" also generated public debate in the city. This measure also included introduction of the Commuter Route, where cyclists were given right of way and green wave (if cycling at speed of 22 km/h). Commuter Route was accepted very positive by the cyclists – as the survey is showing that 70% of cyclists are feeling more happy.

Odense also installed various signs (i.e. route markings) and equipment (i.e. cycle pumps) in the City Centre. A lot of concern is also given to maintenance of the existing cycling network, including parking space for the cycle. Proposed Cycling Strategy is foreseeing decrease by 25% in cycle accidents in 2007.

In one action City distributed some thousands of permanent cycle lights, that do not need batteries and are running by the cyclists muscles, having magnets installed in the wheel. 98% of cyclists are happy with that and city achieved 32% increase of accidents.
Toulouse

Situation of the Grand Toulouse and City of Toulouse regarding cycling is showing high increase of cycling in recent years. Comprehensive policy approach in last decades is providing such results. Most of the bicycle trips are 1 to 2 km long. Most of the cyclists are men and are living in the city centre; moving from the City centre, the bicycle modal share is decreasing. The trips by car from 1 to 3 km are representing more than 60% of all the trips.

In 2002 Toulouse adopted the Cycling network master plan, with a goal to increase of the bicycle modal share by developing a relevant cycling network at the level of the agglomeration. To increase cyclists safety planned network was developed having in mind cycling equipment on the road and on the paths. At the workshop selected safety issue was safety of cyclists at intersections. This selection was supported by data (statistics) on accidents involving cyclists.

Cycling lanes in Toulouse area shall be enough wide to move away from the side parking and not too wide in order to avoid stop on the lane. In case of intersections, the cycling lane exits to the road at the intersections approaches. Lanes can be unidirectional (1,40 m minimum) and bi-directional (if not enough space for 2 unidirectional; 2,50 m minimum). It also has to have physical separation between pedestrian and cycling zones. At the intersections systematic bicycle zone (“sas”) is implemented, where cyclists can use it more safely for turning left or right.

Special concern is given also to parking capacity for individual transport modes, i.e cycling, as having a possibility to park incites to use this mode.

Venice

The Mestre new bicycle master plan, called BiciPlan, foresees doubling the extension of the bicycle network routes in the next 5 years by:

- Connecting existing cycling lanes;
- Identifying 16 continuous cycling routes that connect the city centre to main other urban districts, facilities and services.

After the implementation of the BiciPlan, Mestre will have 97 kilometres of interconnected cycling routes. It should enable reaching its main objective, increasing cycling mobility from 16% to 20-25% of total urban trips by offering continuous, safe and recognizable routes in order to connect the peripheral zones to the city centre. Plan involves also periodic monitoring of obtained results in term of users appraisal and real use of facilities.

Strong emphasize is given to marketing and communication as strategic tools to inform and raise awareness of the citizens and public local community by promoting change in their behaviour. In Italy as in all Europe there is an urgent need to consolidate good experiences of communication and urban marketing because the real objective is not to built extended cycling routes by rather to promote and encourage greener ways of transport and cycling mobility.

Lessons learned

To strengthen sustainable mobility culture and facilitate safer conditions for cycling in urban areas proposed solutions would have to cover different fields of action:

- Infrastructure
- Regulations
- Consistency and equity
- Enforcement
- Training
- Awareness raising, mutual understanding

Working groups, that enabled exchange of experience among the participating experts, have pointed out various safety issues regarding:

- Safety at intersections
- Velo safety and security
- Promotion of safe cycling culture
- Cooperation of NGOs and City Councils

According to statistic of accidents, safety at intersections has been identified as the most critical point when cycling. For higher safety several technical solutions have been identified (i.e. awareness signs, dedicated path, dedicated areas for bicycles) but each of them have advantages and
disadvantages. Main solution is to organize the waiting area between pedestrians, cyclist and motor vehicles. In Denmark in example better safety for cyclists turning left at the intersection is achieved by using dedicated lanes (parallel to pedestrian crosses). With dedicated lanes at intersections one must adopt infrastructure in order to enable for the cyclist to be seen by car and truck drivers.

In Ljubljana bike security is a big issue as many thefts are happening annually. One of possible solutions to this problem is introduction of specific chips against theft of bikes. Insurance is possible only when approved locks are available. In this case financial solution is not the price of the chip but time of the police when looking for stolen bike.

Promotion of culture for safe cycling can be done in various ways, using different tools and focus on different audiences. Only educative projects are time consuming as it takes, in case of Odense, from 20 to 30 years to achieve behavioural change. Education shall be complemented by enforcement (considered not stimulative but obviously needed when prompt changes are necessary) and engineering measures (providing safe infrastructure as a basis). In Odense 30 years ago policy started to solve cycling problems in the city (actions to make better and safer cycling – new and better cycling infrastructure) and politicians were involved (support for cycling). Good communication between administration and cyclists was established. New cycling project in Denmark in 1998 was adopted where health issue was a main driving force. However, common experience (i.e. Odense, Leuven) is that for education the motto is to work with children.

In the cities involved various level and scope of cooperation among NGOs and City administrations developed in the last decades. In example, in Venice, cycling coordinator used to work for NGO and has more critical approach than other city administration personnel because of the inside knowledge of the bicycle riders problems. In Ljubljana more bottom-up approach was developed – 10 years ago NGO started to inform city administration about critical cycling issues in the city (demonstrations on the streets, proposals for elimination of critical points and need to have clear and continuous cycle lanes). In Toulouse various organisations exist for instance offering Rent-a-Bike services (from the enthusiasts to private company formation). In Munich in cooperation with authorities NGO carried out innovative campaign in the city (car free days, city closure for car traffic) and educational activities.

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