Health and transport

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Introduction

During the last decades, chronic diseases caused by inappropriate nutrition and lack of activity have strongly increased in Europe. By commuting and travelling actively, i.e., walking and cycling instead of using the private car, one can not only save money and CO2, but contribute a lot to his personal wellbeing and health.

It is the task of cities and planners, to offer adequate and pleasant infrastructure and environment for such activities. At the same time, people have to be encouraged and motivated to be physically active.

Cycling and walking is still linked to recreation only for many citizens. They need to be encouraged to cycle to work or walk to the bakery – and they also need to see that it is fun and a great benefit to themselves.

Finally, cities need to establish places for recreational activity in the local area. This helps the citizens to be more active and prevents them from covering large distances for recreational aspects. This again becomes an important aspect when discussing impacts and (internal and external) costs of mobility.

CIVITAS has already contributed much to the implementation of “active travel” measures, as it has been emphasised in the White Paper on a European Strategy on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues.

Cycling for better health

During the last five years, there has been an increasing interest on physical activity, nutrition, transport and health by national, European and international entities. An increasing number of people are overweight - and the number keeps on growing. It looks as if we are getting bigger and bigger. To stop the tendency it is not only important to have a look at food habits. It is also very important to look at exercise habits. Half an hour of exercising every day will be beneficial for the health in the long term. For many people this will be fulfilled by bicycling backwards and forwards between home and work.

Even though transport, physical activity, nutrition and health are well recognised individual topics in the political discussion, it is a rather recent development that they are considered from an integrated perspective. However, there is a clear correlation: A 30 year old, inactive male can prolong his life by further 2.8 healthy years by becoming more active, for women it is even 4.6 years. Activity in these terms means to occupy your organism with at least 30 minutes of exercises each day. This could for example mean commuting by bicycle instead of using the private car.
As the Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity stated, local authorities have great potential and a major role to play in creating the environment and the opportunity for physical activity, active living and a healthy diet, and they should be supported doing this.

HEPA Europe (European Network for the Promotion of Health-Enhancing Physical Activity) is bringing together different institutions and organisations across Europe under the umbrella of the World Health Organisation (WHO). It is facilitating multisectoral approaches and promoting and disseminating innovative policies and good practices.

It pays of to bicycle
It is important to exercise every day. The Ministry of Health in Denmark recommend at least 30 minutes of exercise every day to prevent diseases resulting from one’s life style. Lack of exercise can cause a risk of developing cardiovascular diseases. Cardiovascular diseases are some of the most substantial causes of death in Europe. A brisk walk or bicycle trip can prevent both cardiovascular diseases and overweight.

By exercising regularly you can reduce:
- the risk of getting a cardiovascular disease by 50%
- the risk of developing diabetes 2 with 50%
- the risk of developing obesity by 50%
- the risk of getting to high blood pressure by 30%

Exercise also prevents depressions and osteoporosis and is also very good for the motor. Walk or bicycle every day and you can prevent a lot of diseases, get some fresh air and reduce the air pollution. Furthermore a Danish survey (September 2005) shows that increased activity can prolong the lifetime with 3-7 years.

Health and Transport Campaigns in Odense

In Odense there are various activities in the field of Health and Transport. There is a strong focus on campaigns raising awareness and changing behaviour, which have been tailor-made for different groups, such as children, immigrants or older people. Some of the activities are listed below.

Walk for life
This campaign has been designed in order to promote walking in the urban context. While in other countries such as in the UK and Switzerland, pedestrian organisations are well established, this is just about to start in Denmark. Therefore, the City of Odense wants to play an active role in order to push walking as a healthy and clean urban transport mode. Maps with tour descriptions have been developed and distributed to the public together with 5,000 step counters calculating the energy consumption.

Healthy Routes
This campaign addresses particularly pupils by combining health promotion with planning of cycling/walking paths and green areas. So far, one Activity Route has been implemented, including hotspots for activities such as sports, games or bonfires. It is planned to introduce Activity Routes in every school district. Up to now, all routes have been drafted and a common design for logos and signposts has been developed.

Cycling and Ethnic Integration
Cycling is very common in Denmark, having recently outnumbered the Netherlands as Europe’s cycling country. However, it has been observed that some groups practice it less, for example children with immigration background. In this group, a lack of physical activity has been stated. The children tend to use public transport rather than cycling, while dreaming of having an own car in the future. In a survey, the pupils answered that it would be too cold too cycle in winter or considered as “girls’ stuff”.
The aim of this campaign therefore is to encourage young immigrants to cycle and to facilitate their integration into society at the same time. The activities to achieve this include a targeted cycling campaign and visits in school classes.

**Cycle Tours for Seniors**
As other European countries, Denmark is challenged with a growing number of older citizens. In order to promote healthy and active lifestyles among this group, guided trips by bicycle have been developed and offered to the older population, with a focus on 60 to 70 year old people. Eleven trips in four variations have been realised, and 10,000 tour guides were disseminated.

**Get Rid of the Paunch**
Addressing men between 30 and 60 years, this campaign aimed at make them aware of lifestyle related health (and aesthetic) problems and to motivate them to cycle more. It included advertisements in a weekly paper, bus stops, dissemination of postcards to all households, TV spots and happening on the streets. At the end, the campaign was very well remembered (75%) and 11% stated that it made them cycle more.

**Cycle Trailers**
16 kindergartens received cycle trailers for lending out to the parents. The campaign was launched in the spring 2007 and focused on getting more people to choose the bicycle. Instead of going by car to the kindergartens the parents were encouraged to try the cycle trailer for a period of one week.

**Motivating citizens**
A lot of the initiatives in Odense are about motivating the citizens to exercise more. But it is a key element of the health and transport policy in Odense to have internal support by politicians and decision makers. These persons serve as role models and encourage people really to participate in the campaigns. Furthermore, the city administration is giving a good example, applying an internal policy that encourages the use of nonmotorised modes, eating fruits and vegetables and supporting health and activity initiatives. This also includes popular sport events, such as marathons or public runs.

For 10 years the city of Odense has supported the national campaign “Bike to work” with activities and minor campaigns. The campaign addresses particularly commuters and was already successful in generating shifts towards cycling: In 2007 83,000 participants have been counted in the whole country, whereof 13% (or 11,000) were new cyclists.

Also the “Bike to School Campaign” is supported by the city of Odense. As in many other European countries, there is a tendency to bring children to school by car. Apart from being not very sustainable and threatening the safety of other pupils, this does not encourage children to become independent and confident road users. This campaign is in its 6th year already popular and has reached some 70,000 pupils in Denmark only in 2007. In terms of evaluation, 97% of the teachers answered that the campaign is very good, 30% even stated that it contributes to happiness and concentrativeness of children.
Planning the city to inspire

When encouraging the citizens to cycle or walk more the urban planners have a big responsibility. The city has to be inspiring and easy to get around in. One way of working is to create so called “playspots” which is small areas that give the opportunity for spontaneous activity without defining a particular, singular activity, such as sports fields usually do.

Odense is also thinking in creating recreational areas for the citizens. Currently a former waste dump is being transformed into an activity area close to the city. By offering attractive areas close to the city, large trips by car can be saved and shifted towards more sustainable modes. At the same time, citizens are encouraged to be active in two ways: by coming to the area by walking or cycling and by using the various opportunities for physical activity and creativity in the area itself.

When construction is finished, the area will offer a nature trail, playing and action bases and special features such as a Star Base for amateur-astrologers. Also a lake for swimming and spots for events will be installed.

Lessons learned

Health, physical activity and mobility are a topic with raising relevance in the CIVITAS context. This also needs to be related to the background of increasing obesity and demographic change. More efforts are necessary to meet these challenges. Initiatives combining health and mobility require involvement of various stakeholders on the institutional level and beyond.

To motivate citizens to be more active you need good infrastructure in the city but also citizens need to be encouraged to lead an active and healthy life. Campaigns that address different user groups and trip purposes as implemented in Odense could be a way of doing it.

Finally, when thinking sustainable urban transport, we often consider shifts towards cleaner modes and fuels but we also have to consider distances. By offering various facilities and activity spaces in the local area, the need for large distance travel can be reduced, which also facilitates shifts towards more sustainable modes.

The benefits can be found on various levels. By promoting active travel, expenses of the health system and mobility costs can be reduced. At the same time, CO2 and air pollutants can be diminished while improving quality of life. In the light of demographic change, increasing obesity, climate change and unclear fuel provision, promotion of health, activity and of active travel subsequently could become a key activity on European level for the coming years.