

KOPRIVNICA HEALTH PATHS

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ABSTRACT: City of Koprivnica included four sustainable mobility strategies in its planning documents in 2001. By constantly improving pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, the City achieved a high level of sustainable mobility and won European Mobility Week Award in 2008. In the course of nine years, 80km of pedestrian paths/cycling tracks were constructed inside the city. However, it was felt that improvements favoured cycling over walking. Citizen organizations and groups, especially those by former cardiac and diabetes patients as well as several organizations of the disabled citizens used organized walks in the scope of European Mobility Week to point out the need for further improvements of the pathways and pedestrian crossings and requested some safety and accessibility measures. In 2008. Heart Club, organization of cardiac patients and medical professionals measured and promoted a 4km long Heart Path, recommended to all citizens, but especially those recovering from heart disease to use it on the daily basis.

In the scope of Active Access project (IEE, 2009.-2012.) a plan for the network of Health paths was presented to the Urban planning department of the City of Koprivnica, school and kindergarten authorities and interested citizen groups by a project team of medical experts, traffic police officers and Active Access project team for the City of Koprivnica. It was based on the Heart Path experience and expertise, along with several examples of best practice from ELTIS database, and especially the example of Camden City Health paths, which served as a model. Upon the approval of stakeholders, the plan was presented to the public in the scope of Active Spring campaign and walking audits were organized for city officials and future users. A number of comments and recommendations was included in the final form of the network. A map of the network was produced, pedestrian traffic signs posted at seven points and distances to various landmarks expressed in minutes of average walking pace. The network has been promoted through all stakeholders included, as well as Tourist Authority of Koprivnica. General practitioners and medical specialists as well as other medical professionals use the map to advise patients on their walking practice, while schools and kindergartens use the paths for regular daily walking. Paths are equipped with benches and additional street lighting. Their popularity will enable additions in the near future, towards town outskirts and green spaces in the town environs.

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INTRODUCTION

The seat of Koprivnica-Krizevci county in North-west Croatia, Koprivnica has always been a popular town, owing to its well-developed food processing industry and well-organized public life, which took into account the needs of its citizens and developed comfortable residential areas, cultural and sports facilities as well as excellent primary and secondary education institutions. However, the number of cars rose disproportionately from 1970es and in the late 1980es, the City of barely 30000 inhabitants rose to the position of the second nation's champion in car ownership! The crowded streets and decreasing air quality required urgent action.

In the last decade, the image of the City of Koprivnica has considerably changed owing to the City's sustainable mobility strategies: systematic reconstruction of roads with energy-efficient and decreased light pollution solutions and maximum accessibility measures, obligatory widening of pavements and addition of cycling tracks and widening of green areas have transformed the city into a green, bicycle-friendly small urban centre, a desirable place for work and living, according to all citizens' opinions surveys.

The progress has been annually measured and reported in the scope of European Mobility Week initiative, in which Koprivnica participated from the start in 2002. New kilometers of cycling tracks and extensive promotion earned Koprivnica the title of „Croatian Cycling Champion city“ and European Mobility Week Award 2008.

In the scope of the new Active Access project, the city aims at continuing its good practice, while paying more attention to walking infrastructure and resultingly raising the number of daily walking and cycling trips to school, work, for shopping and recreation. The first product of the three-year project is the Koprivnica Health Paths network.

FUNCTIONS OF THE HEALTH PATHS

After a decade of improvements of cycling/walking infrastructure, there has been a feeling, expressed by various citizen groups, medical professionals and educators that walking has not been given enough attention and that cycling tracks have in a way taken precedence in the infrastructure developments. In some instances, removing cyclists from the roads has deteriorated and reduced walking space and considerably affected the safety of pedestrians, especially in the early stages of cycling tracks development. Therefore, the network of Health Paths has been perceived as a welcome addition to the city's infrastructure development. Secondly, the increase in the number of heart disease patients as well as diabetes, osteoporosis as well as obesity in adults and children has been worrying medical professionals and citizens' organizations. Walking as a cost-free and extremely efficient method of disease prevention and therapy has been recognized, leading to an attempt of creating and promoting the first Health path in Koprivnica, by the club of cardiac patients,

cardiologists and nurses called SRCE (Heart) in 2008. Active Access project provided an excellent framework for adding to this initiative, instantly recognized also by kindergarten and school administrators and teachers as a means of safe daily exercise and traffic education opportunity.

Another function of the Health path is the allocation of city's budget for infrastructure improvements. Walking audits of the proposed network of streets revealed further needs and requirements necessary to equip the network with high –quality infrastructure. This requirement can only be fitted into the tight boundaries of the city's budget if the need is confirmed by citizens through an extensive public-participation process, involving a large number of users. Fortunately, this number was reached very soon in the process of Health Path network creation so that extensions to the original network are soon to be added, probably in the three-years' period.

The last, but not less important function of the Health Paths network is to serve the purpose of a small city guidebook which provides visitors with distances expressed in the form of average walking pace and several most important landmarks included in the map and signposts. This is the first pedestrian signalization of this form and function in the city.

STRUCTURE OF THE HEALTH PATHS NETWORK

The network consists of four Health Paths of various lengths, 1km to 3.5 km respectively. Each path is marked by a different colour on the map and is given an appropriate local name. Each path is also designed to suit all users, combining attractive spots, green areas for relaxation with a provision of benches and other sitting arrangements, chemists' or other health- care institutions or services and free drinking water fountains on two and in the vicinity of remaining two walking paths. Each path is also equipped with information posts and the quality of pavement has been improved on more than 70% of the Health Paths surface. The remaining paths have been given priority in the City's reconstruction works plans. The public lighting as well as accessibility and removal of architectural barriers has been found sufficient in the walking audit results and walkers' clubs surveys.

The final attraction of the network has been added by project partners who offered to become official „owners“ of the Health Paths, according to their position along or in the vicinity of the paths as well as their responsibilities or work connecting them with the particular path. This, in return, guarantees the regular maintenance of the Health Paths and their signalization, organization of events and promotion activities unconnected to either Active Access project or the City of Koprivnica offices and departments. It also contributes to the sustainability of the project result and offers possibilities of enlargement of the network in accordance with expressed needs and wishes of other potential Health Path „owners“.

TAKE A WALK ALONG KOPRIVNICA HEALTH PATHS!

The shortest path of 1 km is called Green Path and is drawn in green colour on the network map. It is also called Path Around the Marketplace as it is „owned“ by the City Utility Company Komunalac which is in charge of the city's traditional open-air fruit and vegetable market, offering local produce. The „owner“ uses promotion campaigns to promote local produce offered at the market and connects walking for health with healthy food sale and promotion.

The second shortest health path of 2km is called Youth path or Purple Path. It includes the new residential area with a grammar school, a primary school and a kindergarten. There are city's recreation grounds and swimming pools in the immediate vicinity of the Path. It also involves the city's hospital and Senior Citizens' Home, the „owner“ of the path. For the residents of the Home, the Path is a welcome source of movement and excitement, bringing visitors for events or recreation activities at the Senior Citizens' exercise ground, next to the path itself. The Senior Citizens' Home also provides a free of charge presentation hall where

many health and healthy life-style -related lectures, presentations and measuring campaigns have been organized by citizen groups and health-care organizations.

One kilometer longer and offering a tour through the historic city centre is the 3 km long Renaissance Path, „owned“ by Tourist Authority of Koprivnica. The tour brings visitors to the site of ancient fortifications and the moat surrounding a part of the original town from the 16th century. The annual Renaissance festival has made this area popular with the visitors, while events and all-year-long promotion activities include Town Guards parade and exciting insights into the city's history.

The longest Heart Path of 3.5 km is „owned“ by Heart Club which organizes Annual Heart Day at the end of September but also includes the path in its medical advice programmes and promotions in the city and outside of it.

CONCLUSION

Koprivnica Health Paths have fulfilled several functions in a year-long process of creation and public participation process. By completing the network and putting it to public use, the project team of Active Access and their partners has contributed to the improvement of the walking infrastructure and raised issues of walking safety and maintenance of public spaces. The Health Paths have provided a safe, pleasant and motivating walking environment for various users and hopefully contributed to the overall result of the project: increasing the number of regular walkers to school, work, shopping and recreation purposes. The support to the project has been unanimous and the media has followed the progress of the project with much enthusiasm. In its environment, the City of Koprivnica has once again proved its status of sustainable mobility leader, owing to the Active Access partners on one side and its enthusiastic and supportive citizens on the other. There is little doubt that the network will be successfully extended in the three-years' period in accordance with already expressed wishes of the enthusiastic users and that it is already contributing to the quality of life in our beautiful city.