

Good practices in Promoting Physical Activity in Schools; Gdansk, Poland

Education

Gdansk, Poland

Socio-demographic indicators:

Municipality/City Population: 466,631

Gender ratio: 47% men and 53% women

Age distribution: 0-14 (15.2%), 15-64 (64.8%), +66 (20%)

Socio-economic indicators:

GDP per capita: 70,306 euro

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Health and Physical Activity Issues

Disability, aging population, obesity among children, alcoholism, popularity of private cars as a mean of transport.

Only 53,2% of residents of Gdansk have a correct body weight, which means that almost half of the population of Gdansk is overweight.

Why did you start a strategy / an activity / a project?

To improve the health of the pre-schoolers, schoolchildren and employees (school staff and parents) and improve the safety of travel to school by reducing the number of parents dropping their children off at school. Environmental issues also played a decisive role to start the campaign - more active travel means fewer car trips, and consequently cleaner air and lower levels of noise. Promoting active mobility is a good way to improve quality of life in a city and instil travel behaviours that include as much active travel as possible.

In order to educate children on travel behaviour patterns and help change the travel habits of their parents. We also did it to improve Gdansk's quality of life in Gdansk and reduce the negative effects of transport-related emissions of CO2 air pollution. In addition, the statistics prove that the campaign is a success - it has become very popular among not only residents of Gdansk but among several dozen cities and communes across Poland. In 2019 the number of participants actively taking part in Cycling May reached 178 255 people and 47 cities.

What do you do?

The City of Gdansk implemented an annual campaign promoting active travel to school - the Cycling May campaign. Cycling May is the largest campaign in Poland promoting a healthy lifestyle and sustainable mobility among preschool children, primary school students and teachers. Cycling May, through fun combined with elements of competition, promotes cycling as a means of transport to school, teaches good and healthy habits, which are maintained after the end of the campaign. Cycling May effectively improves the surroundings of schools and kindergartens by ensuring greater safety of pedestrians and cyclists, due to the reduction of the number of cars carrying children and motivating local governments to make pro-cycling investments.

The principles of the campaign are very simple: every pre-schooler or pupil who goes to school by active mobility in the month of May (on a bike, scooter, rollerblade or skateboard) receives stickers for their personal bicycle diary and shared class poster. Children collect stickers and participate in a fun competition both individually and in teams (classes vs classes; schools vs schools). Attractive prizes are provided for the most active participants, classes and institutions. The healthy behaviours of children positively influence their parents to adopt more active travel. Children also learn to be more independent in traffic.

How do you do it?

The main activities and outputs are:

- Organisation of the Cycling May campaign - the general campaign as an output.
- Involving pupils and teachers into the campaign by encouraging them to arrive at school by bike, scooter or rollerblades, during the month of May - number of participants in the campaign and number of their active travels as output indicators.
- Implementation of the campaign on municipal level - number of schools as output indicator.
- Implementation of the campaign on national level - number of municipalities as output indicator.
- Teaching children to ride bicycles in traffic - number of children trained.
- Marketing communication - press releases, social media and website content as outputs.
- Execution of public procurement for outsourcing part of the services - e.g. providing individual and group prizes, printing information materials - certain number of prizes provided and of information materials as outputs.
- Organising a final event for winning schools - one event as an output.

The number of participants are:

- Participants - 178 255 people.
- Managers - 1 national coordinator, 1 or 2 local municipal or communal coordinators per town or commune (47-94), 1 school coordinator at each school.
- Trainers / coaches: 46 local coordinators in all other municipalities and communes that implemented Cycling May in 2019.

The budget is about 600 000 PLN (approximately 138 000 EUR) for Gdansk, including operation of the website and prizes for participants in Gdansk (over 34 000 people). Other cities benefit from knowhow and IT systems supporting the campaign (back-end and front-end, web-based) but fund prizes for participants themselves.

In the case of Gdansk, the project is financed from the municipal budget; some actions are co-financed from the Interreg EU Programme. The City of Gdansk - City Hall of Gdansk is responsible for the organization/implementation/monitoring of the project, and the Active Mobility Unit within the Communal Services Department at the Municipality of Gdansk; Gdansk Rand and Greenery Agency are all involved.

For Cycling May, main partners include schools and kindergartens as well as science, edutainment and entertainment centres, museums, sports centres and other private and public bodies that sponsor group activities as rewards for active participants of the campaign.

What are the Challenges and Successes?

The Municipal Office of Gdansk manages to attract more and more active participants each year. Cycling May started in 2014 and has gradually been adapted by more and more local governments across Poland - 21 in the 2017 edition and already 47 of them in 2019. However, only in Gdansk is this social campaign implemented by all of the city's 67 primary schools. Numbers of participants in Gdansk through 6 editions:

- 2014 - 1 700
- 2015 - 11 000
- 2016 - 22 000
- 2017 - 26 000
- 2018 - 32 000
- 2019 - 33 000

Overall, in 47 municipalities in Poland, there were 178 255 people taking part in the Cycling May campaign, most of them schoolchildren.

The main challenges are management issues. Some of the main challenge has always been coordinating such lively campaigns that attract thousands of participants with a limited workforce. Another challenge is attracting sponsors, coordinating marketing communication and public procurements e.g. for rewards for participants. This challenge is still ongoing since Cycling May grows every year and more and more cities are joining.

There are also participation issues. At the beginning the challenge was to convince schools in Gdansk to take part in the campaign. Not every schoolmaster was convinced of the

benefits of the campaign and showed concern over the safety of children. Now, all the schools in Gdansk are taking part in the Cycling May campaign.

Management issues were dealt with by assigning a bigger team to the task and building an IT system supporting preparation and deployment of the campaign in cities. Participation issues were dealt with through communication and promotion of the campaign. Also the grassroots support of parents provided add-value to the success of this task.