



Car Free Days

Tradition as Part of a New Cycling Culture

Introduction

Car Free Days are becoming increasingly popular. In 2010, UPI, the institute for environment and forecast in Heidelberg (*Umwelt- und Prognose-Institut e.V.*) graphically illustrated the exponential rise in Car Free Sundays since 1985. Car Free Days are not only held as part of regional and nationwide initiatives. On the contrary, Car Free Days are now firmly part of a new leisure culture which is capitalised on by city and tourism marketing. The concept of Car Free Days is relatively simple and cost-effective: Cities or municipalities close roadways in city centres or scenic roadways to motorised traffic for several hours. With a diverse and informative programme of activities, the car-free atmosphere provides a space where people of all ages come together for walking, cycling and in-line skating.

Car Free Day in the Mosel region – ‘Happy Mosel’

The big Car Free Day known as Happy Mosel has been held every year since 1993 and takes place along the scenic wine route known as the Moselweinstraße in Rhineland-Palatinate. Every year approx. 80 kilometres (50 miles) of roadway between the riverside towns of Schweich and Winningen are closed to motorised traffic and opened to cyclists from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The roads chosen for the event vary from year to year. According to organisers, over 2 million people have participated in the event since its inception in 1993. Residents of the region, restaurant and hotel operators, as

well as associations based in the region, offer a varied entertainment programme along the route. The different events and activities transform the region into an exciting place full of fun and recreation. Many visitors use the occasion to also visit other tourist attractions along the route.

Apart from Happy Mosel, the Mosel region stages four other Car Free Days, which are held on different Sun-

Cover images: Left: A40 highway in the Ruhr Area during ‘Still-Leben’, attracting over three million visitors, of which two million on bikes.

Right: The festive character of the swiss slowUps adds to its success (Sempachersee). © www.slowup.ch

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days in the spring and summer. Of all German Länder, Rhineland-Palatinate holds the largest number of Car Free Days.

Mobil ohne Auto (MoA)

MoA ('mobile without a car') is the biggest transport policy alliance campaign in Germany. Its members include, among others, the German Cyclists' Federation (ADFC), the German Nature Conservation Union (NABU) and the German Sustainable Transport Association (VCD). MoA is held on the third Sunday in June and aims at promoting environmentally friendly, socially acceptable and democratic mobility in the form of walking, cycling, public transport and carsharing. Regional focal points of the MoA campaign were set up in Baden-Württemberg, Hamburg and Berlin.

Example: 'Fahrradsternfahrt' in Hamburg

The Hamburg bike rally ('Hamburger Sternfahrt') has been taking place since 1995 as part of the nationwide MoA campaign. The rally is a political demonstration demanding the recognition of cycling as a legitimate and viable mode of transport, as well as more funds for the repair and expansion of cycle paths and bicycle streets and a transport policy that takes into consideration issues related to health and environment (in particular climate). With now 21 routes converging into 5 corridors and over 60 starting points located across the neighbourhoods and outskirts of the city of Hamburg, the bike rally marches to the city centre under the slogan 'more bikes less cars – fit for the climate'. Some church groups gather at the several starting points and hold services for the cyclists interested. More than



ist attractions on offer. The goal is to market and establish regions as cycling and skating destinations.

Who takes part in slowUps?

An evaluation of Car Free Days conducted by Polyquest AG in 2007 showed that the events attract an equal percentage of men and women. Moreover, all age groups are represented at the Car Free Days, and the average age is 40. Nearly 50 % of all participants come to the event by bike, on foot or with in-line skates; 24 % of visitors arrive by bus or train, and 24 % by car. The survey also provides information regarding the economic impact of the events: A single participant spends an average of 20 Euros per event day.

Success factors and quality standards

Car-free streets should definitely be showcased as a decisive success factor and prerequisite for successful slowUps. Other important success factors are the scenic experience and the festive character. Visits to slowUps are free. The decentralised form of organisation with uniform quality standards helps ensure the success of the individual Car Free Days. The route, of course, is one consideration for these quality standards: It must have a surface that is suitable for cyclists and in-line skaters and should be 25 to 60 kilometres (15 to 37 miles) in length, and sufficiently wide and as flat as possible. Other significant quality standards are the professional management of the organising institutions, financing and evaluation.

The name and the logo of the events – ‘slowUp’ – are registered trademarks. All Car Free Days events in Switzerland operate under the same name. This uniform visual identity has a high recognition effect and thus offers an attractive sponsoring platform.



The slowUp logo ensures brand recognition.
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Organising Car Free Days

The national organising institutions are Health Promotion Switzerland (a foundation with legal duty), the foundation SwitzerlandMobility and Switzerland Tourism. These institutions are responsible for the strategic development of slowUps, as well as for the co-ordination, the granting of licences to regional organising institutions etc. The national organising institutions support the regions with financing where possible. Regional

organising institutions are responsible for the planning, organisation and implementation, financing, creation of sponsoring platforms, regional communication and evaluation of the different slowUp events. Most of these organising bodies are associations comprised of representatives from politics, tourism and the municipality. Car Free Days are mainly funded by sponsors.

European Mobility Week

The European Mobility Week originated from a Car Free Day held on 22 September 1998 in France under the slogan ‘Mobile - without my car’. Given its huge success, the European Commission decided in 2000 to declare and organise every September 22 as a Car Free Day. Since 2002 the European Mobility Week (EMW) has been organised around this day from 16 to 22 September. The European Union invites cities and municipalities to join in with actions and activities aimed at promoting sustainable mobility. The highlight of the EMW is the Car Free Day held on 22 September under the slogan ‘In town without my car’. Each EMW has an overarching theme (e.g. accessibility, streets for people, alternative mobility).

The EMW offers cities and municipalities a platform to introduce sustainable transport measures and to inform their citizens about the impacts that day-to-day mobility behaviour has on the environment, health and the quality of life in urban spaces. At the same time, the EMW presents an opportunity to initiate actions aimed at promoting the shift to non-motorised private transport. In 2011 more than 2,200 local cities and municipalities participated in the EMW worldwide.



Bicycle test track for children at the EMW in Bilbao, Spain in 2010.
© European Mobility Week

‘Still-Leben’ A40/B1

On 18 July 2010, citizens gathered along a nearly 60 km (37 miles) motorway stretch between the Ruhr metropolises of Duisburg and Dortmund for a ‘celebration of everyday culture’ during the ‘Still-Leben’ (Still-life) project. As part of the programme for the European Capital of Culture RUHR.2010, the region’s main traffic artery was closed in both directions to motorised traffic and opened up for visitors from 11 in the morning until 5 in the evening. The arrival of visitors was facilitated by shuttle buses and additional public transport services on the main traffic axes of the metropolis region. The northbound track heading from Dortmund to Duisburg was turned into an ‘entertainment track’ with the world’s longest banquet table, where 20,000 tables became a meeting place of various cultures, generations and nationalities.



Cycling through a motorway tunnel during ‘Still-Leben’.

At the same time, a ‘mobility track’ was set up in the southbound direction, from Duisburg to Dortmund, where visitors were able to travel freely on bikes, in-line skates or on foot. The regional chapter of the German Cyclists’ Federation (ADFC NRW) built the world’s longest bicycle museum as part of the ‘Still-Leben’ campaign. On test tracks, visitors were able to test-ride

high-wheel bicycles, recumbents and electric bikes. At the junction Essen-Frohnhausen, a temporary bike rental station was set up with more than 200 bicycles from the Ruhr region, allowing those without their own bike to explore the mobility track on two wheels. The campaign Still-life A40/B1 attracted over three million visitors, and more than two million of them explored the tracks on bikes.

Conclusion

Originally, Car Free Days emerged from the growing environmental awareness manifesting among civil society groups in the 1980s. These events experienced a rapid boom in the 1990s and became institutionalised. The Swiss slowUp is a role model: Politicians, health insurance companies, and associations join forces at national and regional levels under one trademarked event series in order to stage Car Free Days in as many places as possible. At the same time, information is provided on topics relating to health, environment and transport policy, and a new leisure culture is fostered, which also boosts regional tourism. The number of participants, as well as the number of the slowUp events held every year, is constantly growing. In Germany, local Car Free Days are held in urban or rural areas, with the number of participants, either on bike, foot or in-line skates, continuously rising. The organisation and financing are relatively simple. However, it is not enough to merely block off roads, because safety must be guaranteed throughout the entire route.

The organisation of a Car Free Day is a highly promising tool to establish cycling as a mode of transport, to rally for an environmentally friendly transport policy, and to evaluate existing and/or needed cycle-friendly infrastructure. At the same time, Car Free Days offer the respective region or city the opportunity to draw attention to itself and its tourist attractions.



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