

Whitebikes Bratislava: low budget bicycle sharing system

The bike sharing system in Bratislava has been running for over 5 years. During this time, he managed to get 850 users who rides on more than 100 white bikes. From the beginning, the project has been set up to be accessible to everyone, as it was for founders at the beginning. The system is not only low cost but it is also freely available on the Internet so anyone can create very own system in their town, at University or company. Due this, we can found several examples abroad. This project is mainly founded by non profit organization - "Cyclokoalicia" and supported by work of volunteers. Especially, thanks to volunteers this system can work almost self-sufficient. By developing a small system of bike sharing, Bratislava ordered a big bike sharing with thousand of bicycles, that we consider as a big success.

O čom je projekt?

Our project focuses on the creation of community and development of civil society thru a system of low-cost bike sharing. This well running system creates a room for active members whose activities interfere with public life and also raising awareness about issues within the community.



What was the situation in cycling in Bratislava?

Looking back in 2014, Bratislava was not very welcome place for cycling. Those few braves cyclists could not feel safe especially due lack of respect on the road, missing infrastructure or almost no support from public. Helpless individuals demanded change by attending protest but they did accomplish a lot without public support.
(photo of protest)

In the same year, these people started a discussion about how to resolve this issue. Luckily for them, they received an offer - 50 white bikes from National Park in the Netherlands. Those individuals created a group who brought out the idea of bike sharing system. Firstly, they repaired all bicycles, individually marked them by number and distributed in the town. In the beginning, there was no automation with locking system. Each user had a list of codes on paper for all bikes. The bike sharing was limited to tiny testing group. This system could not keep with users' demands, so the creation of source code was needed. Thanks to a new system, bike sharing started to using the web page and sms.

What was the municipality reaction?

Bratislava did not respond at first. The town kept ignoring cyclists' community and did not take into consideration any their needs while projecting urban infrastructure. The municipality started a discussion with group of activists only after the number of their users increased and media got interested in this topic. The "cyklokoalicia" was established. On their monthly meetings, they tried to develop walking and cycling. Later on, Bratislava decided to launch a selection procedure for official bike sharing. Even municipally signed a contract with provider, they did not manage to find a financial partner due to their incapacity. The effort of Whitebikes did not stop and they kept working on the paradigm.

How did the project affect the development of communities in the Slovak Republic?

The project uses Open Source license that is freely available on the Internet so anyone can download and create own system in their town. Due to this, we were approached by several people from various cities (Martin, Čadca) who wanted to set up their own bike sharing system. One of the first success story was a yellow bicycle (<http://zltebicykle.sk/> <http://yellowbikes.info/>) from Kezmarok. We were approached by Dominik Jakub who managed to get bicycles from sponsors, municipality and local community. Thanks to his hard work and enthusiasm, the bike sharing system worked very well and he received excellent response from locals. He also involved Romany minority. At the same time, it was created first commercial bike sharing in Slovakia, in Prievidza - <https://www.zelenybicykel.sk/>. They used our system in the beginning. The launching of this project also received huge attention of inhabitants and politicians. Green bikes were so popular that the project had zero violence. Today, the system has been transformed and they are trying to succeed in the commercial market. Later, we met with Michaela Hefkova from Nitra. It was another town where we planned to set up bike sharing. We tried to share all our experience in working with the local council and community. Michaela managed to run an active community of critical mass in Nitra. After the election, she became a vice mayor. Currently, we are in touch with activists from Kosice who could set up bike sharing there.

What was the response in the media?

The media had been also interested in the topic of cyclo transportation and bike sharing. Within the framework of the media monitoring, only the theme of cyclotracking is measured, it also covered bike sharing. These topics were mentioned by Newspapers Denník N, Hospodárske noviny, Nový čas, Plus 1 deň, Pravda, Sme, TV, Radio and several other

magazines. In the year 2016, this topic was mentioned 182 times, in 2017, it was 244 times. This topic was reflected in the campaigns of many politicians.

How did the bike sharing project affect foreign countries?

Our system is available on the Internet (<https://opensourcebikeshare.com/>) and the Internet has a global influence. WhiteBikes are the first bike sharing system published as an open source license freely available on the Internet. Due to that, we are regularly contacted by people from several countries, who are interested in setting up bike sharing in their country. One of the smaller projects was created in Zadar, Croatia. Based on our system, it was created bike sharing in a military base in El Paso, Texas <https://milbike.com/> . Another community was built in German town, Heidelberg. <http://www.teilrad.de/> . We did not expect that the system will return to the donor country. <https://www.cykl.nl/> Netherland. There could be other examples that we are not aware of as many people can set up the system without our help.