

# **Strategies For Knowledge Transfer Between Experienced Countries And Countries Without Bicycle Infrastructure**

## **Examples from Danish cooperation with Baltic Countries and from the EuroVelo project.**

Jens Erik Larsen  
Idéværkstedet De Frie Fugle, Borgergade 14,5, DK-1300 København K  
Email: Friefugl@post8.tele.dk

### **Summary**

In order to help developing cycling in East Europe as an environmentally friendly form of urban and recreational transport, two seminars have been arranged in Lithuania and Estonia. The aim of the seminars is to highlight experiences with cycling from Denmark and the Baltic Countries and to create contacts between the countries in order to facilitate the promotion of cycling and bicycle safety.

The seminars were directed toward a broad group, e.g. politicians, civil servants, planners, NGO's and businessmen working in the field of transport, environment, tourism and bicycle rent and sale. Actually the seminars did get a high political awareness, many participants and high awareness also from the press media.

The seminar in Estonia took place in September 99 and was planned by Idéværkstedet De Frie Fugle and The Danish Cyclist Federation, supported by the Estonian Ministry of Environment and financed by Danish Environmental Protection Agency.

Experiences with knowledge transfer from west to east Europe have also been important within the EuroVelo project. The European cycle route network project have indeed inspired many countries in eastern Europe to develop cycle routes, and the EuroVelo map itself is managing development of national routes in these countries.

### **Background to the Seminar in Estonia**

The idea about helping Estonia to develop cycling as a means of transportation actually started back in 1991 after the new independence of the country. Ege Hirv from Green Movement visited Copenhagen in those days and gave us some inspiration to formulate a bid.

From the work inside European Cyclists Federation (ECF) and later the EuroVelo project (European Cycle Route Network), we did already have a good contact: Rein Lepik, president of Vanta Aga, an Estonian NGO (cyclist organization). So together with Rein Lepik, we started developing the concept for a project.

De Frie Fugle and Dansk Cyklist Forbund prepared then together a bid to "Demokratifonden", Min. of Foreign Affairs. However this was finally not selected. When the Danish Minister of Environment & Energy, Svend Auken in a speech 1995 mentioned, that it would be a good idea to help to develop environmental friendly means of transport in eastern Europe, we wrote a letter to him and offered our help. In 1997 this resulted in a bid to Danish Environmental Agency offering to prepare a bicycle seminar in Estonia. In the end of 1998, we received a positive answer and the planning started.

The seminar "Improving the Environment by Developing Cycling" was held in Tallinn & Tartu in Estonia 22.-24. of September 1999.

### **Some results from the seminar**

More than 100 participants joined the seminar including 10 speakers from Denmark who also stayed and joined an excursion on Saturday, organised by the Green Movement of Estonia.

At the political level the interest for the seminar also had a high awareness. The seminar was opened by the Estonian Minister of Transport and Communication, the Vice State Secretary of Environment and the Danish Ambassador. Next day's programme was opened by the mayor of Tallinn and in Tartu the Vicemayor opened the third day.

The press coverage was remarkable. Several television channels made presentation before the seminar, during the seminar and afterwards. Similar interest was shown from the printed medias and radiostations.

In Estonia many barriers have to be overcome before cycling can be developed like in Denmark. Some of these are related to infrastructure, others concerns the society (like bicycle theft) and maybe the most important ones relate to psychological matters (to make people as well as politicians and civil servants believe that cycling can be a realistic and attractive option).

So the way forward seems not only to concentrated on help with planning and implementation of infrastructure, but information, public relations, campaigns, involvement of users and potential users etc. are important parameters.

### **Ideas for future cooperation**

Some concrete ideas came up during the final session of the seminar and during an evaluation meeting among the Danish speakers:

- Some lanes of the very broad boulevards of Tallinn should be reserved for cyclists before they are filled with cars
- The fact that Tartu already has a significant use of bicycles (e.g. by students), could be used as a basis for a big scale project developing the city into The National Cycling City of Estonia.
- Cooperation between Danish and Estonian Universities on education in bicycle planning and cycling strategies could be promoted.
- Exchange visits with a significant educational content could be carried through
- The current interest into cycling for recreation and sport should be used as offset for increasing an interest in cycling for daily purposes.
- Politicians and other keypersons from ministries, counties and cities could be invited to come to Denmark
- Attempts could be taken to involve The Danish Ministry of Transport in future projects
- Similar seminars could be held in other East European Countries like Poland, Latvia, Ukraine.

These possibilities are now investigated. A letter have been sent to the Minister of Transport and Communications in Estonia and a meeting have been held with Danish Ministry of Transport, and the ministry seems positive against offering more money for concrete projects in the 3 Baltic States as long as the countries themselves formulate some concrete wishes/projects.

### **Experiences from EuroVelo**

In Estonia a signposting system for cyclists similar to the Danish one have been developed After the seminar and the EuroVelo routes are being implemented now.

During the proces of investigations, a huge amount of local cycling groups and planners etc. have been involved. The routereport consultants have met great entusiasme concerning the EuroVelo idea. We can now conclude that no other project in Europe have to day created so much activity when it comes to construction of bicycle facilities. Especially in Easteurope and in France the proposed European Cycle Route Network have already pushed many authorities to take cycling more serious and to implement cycle routes.

So if we tried to stop the project now due to lack of ressources at the central level, it would simply continue anyway, using the official EuroVelo Map as coordinator.

EuroVelo seems in general to be the concrete project Easteurope can use:

- 1) to push cycling
- 2) for direct knowledge transfer
- 3) and finally EuroVelo actually connects the cycle networks in west and east Europe.