

LA ROCHELLE *France*



75,000 inhabitants

La Rochelle is a touristic city on the French Atlantic coast that aims to become a slow town, meaning that 80% of the streets will be limited to a speed of 30 km/h in the coming years. The Living Streets offer the opportunity to experiment, to test life without cars and imagine a different use of public space. With this initiative, La Rochelle is using bicycles as a central tool, as it is not only seen as a transport mean, but is also used as a voluntary behaviour change factor.


Increase home-to-school and school-to-home travel by foot and by bike: The Children's Street

The Pierre Loti School is situated in a social mixed area within a small district. An attractive park is situated in front of the school but the Pierre Loti Avenue, supporting 8,000 vehicles daily, disconnects this green area from the school. The parents are afraid to let the children go by bike or by foot to school and think that cars are the safest option to take the children to school. Many of the school children do not even know how to ride a bike. For these reasons, the Mobility Department of the municipality contacted the school to see if together they could transform this busy road into a car-free street for a day. This provided the opportunity for the children to play in the street and in the park and have fun while learning how to ride a bike.

The street in front of the school was closed for one day in June 2016 and May 2017.

The activities organised included: home to school escort by bicycle (organised by the Bicycle Police Brigade/Bicycle School) and by foot (organised by the parents), a bike and games lending library, a bicycle training area, some workshops and information on bicycle repairs, biking safety, using public transport, free trial of different cargo bikes with bike stores.

This initiative has enabled the creation of a playground in the park next to the school and bicycle parking places. It also favoured inter-generational exchange between the school and the nearby retirement home. Parents launched a petition to have shared urban gardens in the park. It was decided that



60,000 euros will be spent by the municipality to set the garden up which will be open to all residents in the neighbourhood, including the retirement home. Besides, bike stores have increased their income and are selling more bikes, including foldable bikes and cargo bikes. Elected representatives, teachers and parents are now reflecting on how to include bike learning in the school programme.

The Children's Street initiative is sustained by several activities. Following the two one-day events organised by the municipality, the school and the parents have organised on their own a third event in April 2018, including a bike market and a party in the street, with the participation of associations. The municipality initiated the process and now parents, children and school teachers are responsible to organise such events in the future, with the municipality offering support, but not acting as a driving force anymore. In addition, other schools are interested in this initiative and a new Children' Street with another school will be organised in a different neighbourhood.



Develop the attractiveness of commercial areas in the city centre

The first experiment took place in the old marketplace from July to August 2016. This place is today used as a big round-about for cars, reducing the space available for pedestrians. The shopkeepers would like to reduce the car's presence but at the same time authorise freight access for the market in the morning. A modular access was therefore needed. A

solution was found together to regulate the access, using colourful signs to mark the limits of the pedestrian zone during the event. From July to August 2017, the second experiment was organised in the Saint-Nicolas district, a small shopping area, a little hidden away just behind the old harbour. The aim was to make this neighbourhood visible from far away and attract more people to this area. All the shops are small local shops and



shopkeepers are struggling to attract more clients to the city centre, taking into account the competition of the huge commercial areas located outside of the city centre. Posters showcasing shop owners have been produced by the municipality, using the ENGAGE poster tool (www.citiesengage.eu). Shop owners could promote cycling on these posters that were displayed in their shops. An exhibition of ENGAGE posters was also organised by the municipality, including posters with students, teachers, civil servants putting forward their different arguments for cycling.

The most significant result of these experiments is the change of mind set of shopkeepers who no longer claim “no car, no business”. More people are now shopping by bike as citizens realised that the cargo bike is faster than the car. This shows that it is important for people to have a voluntary behaviour change, but for that it is crucial that they try and experiment beforehand, so that they realise the advantages

that a different lifestyle might bring. Shopkeepers are using bikes to buy their products and to dispose of their waste. Bike stores and shop owners have increased their income during this test phase, some of them by up to 25%. The shop owners’ association, gathering almost 100 members, are now reflecting on how to encourage shopping by biking and walking to make this lifestyle attractive to their potential customers and thus differentiate themselves from the big commercial centres on the outskirts of the city where customers need a car to shop there. The project has also brought more sociability, for example shop owners now put chairs outside of their shops, in order to invite passers-by to sit and appreciate the excellent quality of life in their city.

Living Streets: a modular experience for the city of La Rochelle

Living in an urban environment conceived for car use, makes it difficult for people to imagine and have another vision for the future

of the public space in their city. The municipality of La Rochelle implemented Living Streets as a motivating and modular experience allowing citizens to experiment different aspects of what life without a car means and see all the benefits that this might bring to them. However, with this experience, the municipality of La Rochelle does not aim for example to replicate the same children’s street in all schools, but a new concept based on the needs of each district. Each street is different and the municipality aims to keep the co-construction process that took place in the first children’s street. The Living Streets enabled seeds to be planted for the future, provided time and space for first-hand experience and let things happen.

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