

VELENJE'S FUA PILOT ACTION

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1. Velenje FUA

1.1. Description of Velenje FUA

Velenje FUA is defined by number of daily migrants. It consists of municipalities from which the most daily migrants come to Velenje and vice versa: Velenje, Šoštanj, Mislinja, Slovenj Gradec, Celje, Žalec, Polzela, Šmartno ob Paki, Mozirje and Nazarje. There are 3 bigger towns with higher number of employments inside FUA: Velenje, Slovenj Gradec and Celje. Velenje FUA region has 152.013 inhabitants and 66.637 employments.

1.2. Basic Mobility Situation

Velenje is situated in the Šalek Valley along the transport route between the Celje and Slovenj Gradec Basin. Another important transport route runs towards Šoštanj and the Upper Savinja Valley. Velenje is the eighth largest city in Slovenia and an important employment and education centre of the Region. The Region has public bus transport available as well as rail traffic in some municipalities. Public passenger transport in the region cannot compete against commuting with a private car as it is not frequent and fast enough compared to commuting with a private car. Some cities have an automated bike rental system in place, and Celje and Velenje also provide public urban bus transport.

1.2.1. Modal split and target values

	2019	2025
The share of pedestrians	18 %	21 %
The share of bikes	7 %	16 %
The share of public transport	13 %	23 %
The share of cars	62 %	40 %

Table 1: Modal split for Velenje FUA

2. Pilot action

2.1. Description of pilot action

The Municipality of Velenje introduced the automated bike rental system as early as in 2012. To this day, there have been over 3000 registered users, and we have connected the system with the neighbouring municipality as well. In the framework of the Smart Commuting project, the Municipality of Velenje upgraded the bike rental system with Bicy electric bikes. There were 12 existing rental stations in Velenje until 2019. Two of them, one in the city center and the second one in the densely populated part of the town, were rebuilt in the frames of Smart Commuting project. We replaced 2 (out of 6 or 8) old pillars with 2 new pillars at each of the two stations, which provided a charging spot for electric bikes. We have set up also two new rental terminals for e-bikes and have bought four new e-bikes. Old, regular bikes from the bike sharing scheme are red, new bikes are green. So we give a clear signal to the user which bike is electric and which is regular.



As there was quite a big interest in renting electric bikes in the first month after implementation we already upgraded the rest of the bike sharing system so there is a basis to include more electric bikes in it. All renting stations now have the ability for charging and renting of electric bikes. This is definitely the most powerful effect of the pilot - it was tested, recognized as useful and upgraded. We will buy more e-bikes during next years to promote cycling and active mobility on longer distances. Also promotion campaign will continue.

The implementation was held up with the awareness raising campaign. We developed a common Graphic design for promoting the change of travel habits. Graphic design has been further developed even outside of the project and successfully implemented through different means: we posted many news on Facebook and web pages (also press releases), SAMBA, we published billboards, posters, rolls-up, T-shirts and organized some events (collecting the stamps on your bike-ride and deserving a reward, European mobility week supported also with the same graphical design...). We rebuilt the sign boards at the renting station for bikes with the same graphical design, where we labelled the distances by bikes (in minutes) and we also added the positive effects of everyday cycling on the human and the city. Some sign boards also include the statements of the citizens explaining why they have decided to cycle to work. Even 3 bigger sign boards are established for labelling of the improving the cycling network in Velenje also using the same graphical design, cycling facts and interesting facts about the surroundings. We will continue with the campaign even after the project's ending.

The promotion within the project Smart Commuting can be seen in the reporting of D.C.6.1 Social media activity.

We also filmed 2 videos. The first one is presenting why to use a bike instead of a car on shorter routes. The second one gives instructions how to use the new system. The videos are part of D.C.7.1.





Figure 1: One of the images in the new awareness raising campaigns.



Figure 2: One of the images designed to be used for promoting of the events in Facebook.



Figure 3: Figure promoting the use of bike.



Figure 4: One of the sign boards on the bike renting station equipped with the same logo and design (financed outside of the project).



Figure 5: One of the billboards (financed outside of the project).



Figure 6: One of the posters (financed outside of the project)

2.2. Implementation of pilot action

We started with the public procurement for the building of new pillars and buying of new bikes in December 2018. Bikes were delivered in May 2019, the stations were rebuilt during the summer of 2019. The new system has been opened since autumn 2019. In the spring of 2020 we added disinfectants on the stations to help the prevention against COVID-19, also other stations have been rebuilt for e-bikes in that time.

Activity	P4 Dec 2018 - May 2019	P5 June 2019 - Nov 2019	P6 Dec 2019 - May 2020
Preparation of public procurement	x		
Delivery of e-bikes	x		
Promotion (Social media)	x	x	x
Upgrading of the bike sharing system		x	
Testing of the upgraded bike sharing system		x	x

Table 2: Activities implemented

2.3. The results and effects of the pilot action

This pilot project is aimed at encouraging of our citizens to use bikes as a means of commuting as well as to help them overcome larger distances or steeper slopes. At the same time, users are allowed to test the



e-bikes. We think we will encourage higher number of people to use the bikes and to change the mode of transport from car towards bikes for shorter distances. Consequently there will be less CO2 emitted.

In a year time, we noticed that e-bikes are popular for renting and people usually prefer them. This also shows a need of implementation of more e-bikes in the system.

The usage of bikes: When implementing the new system we had to renew the whole renting system, so each user had to register again and get the new card, new PIN number. This, together with the COVID pandemics, resulted in smaller numbers of newly registered users. The number has fallen from 2600 to 233.

But we can say we got back the real, serious users:

1. We track less damage on bikes and less inappropriate use.
2. We noticed the number of rented bikes per number of users has risen.

The old system had on average 0,03 of rentals per registered user per day (or 77 of rentals in average per day), in the new system we count 0,14 of rentals per registered user per day (or 33 of rentals in average per day), which is more rentals per registered user per day than it was when e-bikes were not in the system yet. We believe the rebuilt system is now more attractive for users because the number of rentals per user has raised. Probably each user uses the bikes more often.

We believe we will attract more users after the pandemics: there were 2 lockdowns in a year so there is less commuting and more work from home and people may not like to share the bikes because of the possibility of infection. We will upgrade the system with more e-bikes shortly so we expect higher numbers of rentals after this and of-course when the pandemics will stop.

The overall impact of the pilot action on the daily commuting within the FUA: One of the impacts of implementing of the pilot action is that we have rebuilt all the stations in rental system after implementing the pilot on just two of them as we found out it is popular and obligatory to make the system better functioning. The other is, that also the neighbouring Municipality of Šoštanj in our FUA followed our example. So now it is possible to commute by e-bike between Šoštanj and Velenje where most of daily commuters commute very day.

We can say there has been the impact on daily commuting within FUA, but it is hard to measure it at the moment. The COVID situation has affected mobility a lot. We have experienced 2 lockdowns in less than a year (spring 2020 and autumn 2020), so a lot of business don't operate or people work from home. Some people can be scared of sharing the same bike because of possibility of getting infected. We think the real impact will be seen a year after the pandemic is finished. In many countries the use of bikes is higher, but there probably is the distinction between use of personal or shared bikes. We will monitor the renting and registration data during next years.

2.4. Sustainability and transferability of pilot action

This pilot action improves the possibilities of sustainable commuting in Velenje FUA, because it allows more people to use bikes instead of a car: electric bikes make longer trips more comfortable and bike-friendly. Also the hilly terrain is much easier to cope with.

As Velenje shares the same bike sharing system with neighbouring municipality of Šoštanj this pilot action could be transferred to their area as well. Also it is transferable to other municipalities who already implemented the bike sharing systems and are thinking of upgrading it with the e-bikes. They can learn from the whole processes of implementation.



The further expansion of the system is planned in following years but it will base on the data of using the existing system and built cycling infrastructure. The plan in being yearly updated. The expansion will go in the direction of suburban settlements.

2.5. Lessons learnt

The technology gives us always possibility to develop services to a higher level. Our bike sharing system has been 7 year old since first implementation and it really needed some upgrades. If you do not follow the best available new technologies and possible improvements this can result in the declining of number of users. The system has to be attractive and up-to day to give the best possible results. It always has to give the opportunity to test something new or to support people to decide for alternative easily.

2.6. The facts

Location of pilot action	Velenje
The cost for implementing pilot action	21.000 €
Partner contribution	6.140 €
EU co-financing	14.860 € from Interreg Central Europe Programme
The result	4 e-bikes, 2 upgraded rental station
Duration of pilot action (temporary or permanent)	permanent
Contact for further information	smartcomm@velenje.si; www.velenje.si

Table 3: Facts about Velenje's pilot action

3. Conclusions

Our pilot action was planned to test the popularity and the need of introduction of e-bikes in the bike sharing system of Velenje. In the time of testing we found out the rebuild was a must and that we have to continue with upgrading of the system. Pilots are important in both ways. As to prevent of doing unnecessary big investments if not needed or not being accepted or not being functional and to test what is important for users and what is user friendly. E-mobility is increasing in its popularity among citizens, it allows them to wear more business-look dresses, to arrive earlier, to prevent sweating when riding uphill, to help them cycling if they are physically less capable.



4. Photos





Figure 7: New electric bike.



Figure 8: New rental station – in front of Municipality of Velenje



Figure 9: New rental station in Gorica.