Citizen Advocacy for Safe Streets in Bremen, Germany

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Citizen Advocacy for Transportation Change in Bremen, Germany

THE “VERKEHRSWENDE FROM BELOW“ OR NEIGHBORHOOD EXPERIENCES IN MAKING SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT CHANGE IN BREMEN

ANNE KIRKHAM, MA

KIRCHWEG NEIGHBOR INITIATIVE, TRANSPORTATION CHANGE BREMEN NEUSTADT, ADFC
The “Sielwall” intersection in Bremen’s hip “Steintorviertel” neighborhood: bikes, trams, pedestrians and motorized traffic in narrow urban spaces with no conscious planning.
Bike trips under 5km (3 miles) are not increasing in Bremen, because the infrastructure is not there. Committed cyclists ride in all weather; potential cyclists take transit or drive.
Motorized traffic in Bremen Produces 25% of total CO2 Emissions

Germany faces possible sanctions for human rights violations, yet decision-makers and industry continue to ignore this reality. Society as well as our environment demand change!
Real-Life Insanity: the Stephanibrücke and our State’s Attitude Towards Cyclists

- Bremen’s bridges are aging and traffic continues to increase. So a lane on the bridge was made more narrow – not for cars and trucks, but for cyclists and pedestrians!

- Officially, the bridge now weighs 234 metric tons less without the extra cycle traffic (257 US tons). Yet the fencing itself weighs 8 metric tons (8 US tons 16 lbs). The chain link units weigh 16 kilos (35 lbs) each, the concrete supports are 31 kilos (68 lbs) – clearly an illogical calculation!
Our First Task: Enforce Traffic Laws, and Manage Parking

We pay rent and taxes for housing; why is on-street parking free? Why do visitors’ vehicles and delivery vehicles have more rights than humans?
Transportation Without Planning: Kirchweg in the Neustadt (New Town)

Once again bicyclists and pedestrians, including school-age children, are pushed to the margins of public spaces, because decisionmakers resist calming measures.
Our Intersection - Kirchweg (left); Kornstrasse (right)

Why do the separated bike lanes end at the crossing? Why are laws not enforced? Why does Bremen refuse to take action on traffic calming? Why do decisionmakers resist lowering speed limits?
Citizen Action: The Blue Intersection
(July 2016)

Laws not enforced: illegally parked vehicles, speeders, sidewalks/wheelchair ramps blocked, motorists’ disregard for yielding laws (left yields to right)

Authorities’ answer: “we don’t have time or money to address your concerns”

Residents took matters into their own hands and painted the crossing

The response: paint was rapidly removed and the neighbors had to pay for its removal;

The result: a public discussion about the problems with this intersection; consciousness raising, some interest from authorities
Ongoing Actions Against Illegal Parking

Locksmith’s vehicle parks on guidelines for the blind at tram stops; repeated reports to the police and authorities fruitless. Other motorists have started parking there too.

(Water-soluble) stickers on illegally parked cars seem to be helping to a limited extent, yet parking management is the job of the authorities!
Clean Air and Safe Streets are a Human Right!

Measuring particulate and NO2 emissions in Kirchweg thanks to Deutsche Umweltshilfe. NGOs can pressure the government, if officials are willing to listen to their evidence!

So far transportation politics has been driven by the automobile lobby more than any other entity.
Kirchweg with Traffic, Kirchweg with People
(A Normal Day vs Street Closed for International Children's Day)

Reimagining our world and making the possible visible allows us to envision what our cities could look like.
Although permission was granted at very short notice, and the morning was rainy, hundreds of people attended. People, and most importantly children, experienced using public space that is normally occupied by private motor vehicles.
Challenges and Advantages for Sustainable and Democratic Transportation Politics in Bremen and Germany

The Challenges
- Intransparent political structures; no information flow to and from citizens (“Who do I call?”)
- Entrenched bureaucracies resist change (“No evidence“)
- Party politics hinder participation
- Powerful automobile lobby with close ties to politicians
- Lack of awareness of transport as an environmental issue

The Advantages
- Bremers do use bikes and transit
- Grassroots advocacy and awareness increasing in Germany (Berlin as an example)
- Media is increasingly raising awareness
- Environmentalism (if not “deep green“) part of German culture
- The realities of climate change for a city at sea level
- Aging infrastructure needs to be repaired
Sources and References


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