How to guide
Community-driven small sport facilities

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Sustainable and inclusive access to sports practice (SIASP –project)

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Front page photo by: OZ Pedal.

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Project overview

The benefits of cycling are well known and the support and development of cycling gets included in strategic documents on local, national and European levels. Schemes and campaigns that encourage people to bike to school and bike to work are present in countries all over Europe. However, the potential of projects and programs that encourage children to cycle to venues of their extracurricular activities seems to be untapped. That is why the Winter Cycling Federation along with partners from Slovakia (Cyklokoalícia) and Austria (Active) have initiated the Sustainable and Inclusive Access to Sport Practice (SIASP) project.

It is getting to sports practice and extracurricular activities where the phenomenon called “helicopter parenting” or “mom taxi” is most prevalent – in Finland, Slovakia and Austria but also in any other European country. Parents drive their kids everywhere to keep them safe, but this can prevent children from becoming independent. Our project shows the affected families that there is a better way to get around. In addition, the project pays attention to low-income families, where children often cannot participate in sports activities because they do not have a way to get there.

Pic. 1.: Dutch kids on a way to school. Source: Rina Mae Acosta.

Introduction

What if we've been looking at sports in cities all wrong? What if the answer to healthier, more independent children isn't in larger stadiums, expensive memberships, or sports clubs – but in leftover corners of public space, repurposed by people who simply cared?

Across Europe, small teams of neighbors, parents, teachers and young people are quietly reshaping the way children move – without waiting for top-down decisions or major budgets. They build skateparks from scratch, revive old hockey fields, build bike parks on forgotten plots of land. They fight through years of bureaucracy, write their own project plans, and rally their communities around the belief that physical activity shouldn't be a privilege – it should be a part of daily life, right outside your door.

This publication follows their stories. But it's not just a catalogue of random playgrounds. It's a map of a growing shift: from competitive sports to joyful movement, from formal memberships to open-access spaces, from passive commuting to everyday active mobility. It also asks difficult questions: Why are so many playgrounds still designed without the children who use them? Why do cities invest in distant mega-sports facilities but ignore the park behind your house? And most importantly – why are so many children still being driven to sports practice, when they could be playing, skating or cycling just a few minutes from home?

You'll read about Vienna's bicycle playgrounds, created because there was literally no safe place to teach kids to ride. You'll learn how the people of Malinovo crowdfunded and built a hockey rink with their own hands. In Levice, grassroots activism turned into a public movement, resulting in one of the most diverse and inclusive sports parks in the region. You'll also discover how the city of Trnava integrates citizen's voices directly into urban planning – setting an example for other municipalities.

And somewhere between these pages, you'll find a secret. A truth that changes how we think about cities, parenting, and freedom: The biggest transformation in children's mobility won't come from what we add – it will come from what we stop doing. Like driving kids everywhere. Like gatekeeping. Like postponing change until someone else starts it.

This guide is for anyone who believes that children should move not because they have to, but because they want to. That cities should be places of play and discovery – not just traffic and routines. That public space belongs to everyone, especially to those who move actively.

Benefits of Accessible & Inclusive Sports Facilities and Services

Summary of the first SIASP Project Report (03.12.2024).

The whole publication can be found online at https://shorturl.at/VOHeg.

Pic. 2.: Lähirähinä community sports program in Oulu, Finland. Source: lahirahina.fi.

Introduction: The Crisis of Physical Inactivity

Modern societies face a silent yet significant crisis: a decline in physical activity among children and adolescents. The SIASP (Sustainable and Inclusive Access to Sports Practices) project, funded by the EU under the ERASMUS+ Sport Programme, explores solutions to this issue. While organized sports are often seen as a remedy, research suggests that they can also contribute to the problem by limiting access and increasing specialization pressures.

Children's independent outdoor play has decreased due to multiple factors, including increased screen time, traffic concerns, and "car-parenting," where children are driven to activities rather than engaging in active travel. Despite the focus on safe school routes, leisure-time activity trips, which constitute a significant portion of children's daily travel, remain largely ignored in urban planning. This contributes to a system in which some children have access to high-cost, specialized sports, while others face barriers to participation, increasing risks of sedentary lifestyle diseases.

Pic. 3.: Source: Timo Perälä.

The Economic and Social Impact of Inactivity

Physical inactivity has profound economic costs. The World Health Organization estimates that, between 2020 and 2030, over 500 million people will develop non-communicable diseases linked to inactivity, costing €25 billion annually. In Finland, the cost per person due to inactivity is estimated at €580 per year, with physically inactive employees costing €480 more annually than active ones.

Furthermore, sports participation is becoming increasingly exclusive due to rising costs and travel demands. Research shows that participation in organized sports does not necessarily lead to higher physical activity levels, as children often lack sufficient low-intensity movement outside structured training.

Additionally, long commutes to sports facilities increase economic burdens on families and the environment. In a city of 250,000 inhabitants, annual travel costs for youth sports activities can reach €4.7 million, with a significant portion borne by families.

Parkour & workout playground in a residential zone. Source: Park pohybu Levice.

The Role of Active Travel and Urban Design

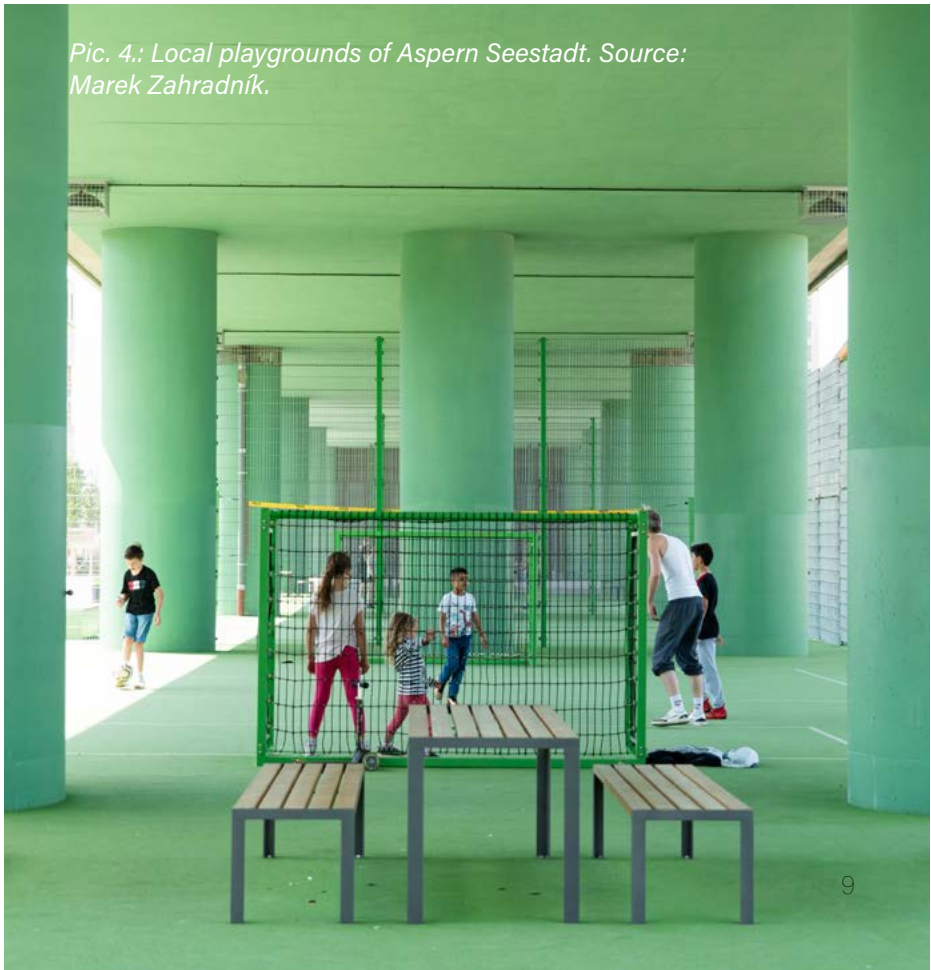
Research highlights the importance of active transportation – walking and cycling – to increase children's overall physical activity. However, most leisure-time activity trips are made by private car, even when distances are short. This dependency is driven by factors such as long distances to facilities, equipment transport needs, and tight family schedules.

To address these issues, cities must adopt child-friendly urban planning principles, focusing on:

- *Active urban design* that promotes safe, inclusive play environments.
- *Proximity-based leisure-time activities* to reduce travel distances and costs.
- *Mobility management* to optimize transport logistics for youth sports.

Examples from around Europe demonstrate the effectiveness of these approaches:

- *Seestadt Aspern, Vienna:* Prioritizes pedestrians and cyclists, creating a city where children can independently engage in outdoor activities.
- *Oulu, Finland:* Offers a year-round active travel network with 960 km of pedestrian and cycling paths, providing safe access to schools and sports facilities.
- *Hackney, London:* Implements "permanent play streets" and child-friendly urban design to encourage spontaneous outdoor play.



Pic. 4.: Local playgrounds of Aspern Seestadt. Source: Marek Zahradník.

Community-Based Sports and Their Benefits

Community-based sports initiatives focus on inclusiveness and accessibility, targeting children and adolescents who are often excluded from traditional organized sports due to cost, location, or social barriers. These programs aim to enhance physical activity while fostering social cohesion, skill development, and a sense of community. They also reduce the economic burden on families by minimizing travel costs and providing free or low-cost participation.

Pic. 5.: Skateboarding event in the multifunctional public sports space in Levice. Source: Matúš Rendek.

Importance of Community Sports

Community sports serve as a bridge between organized competitive sports and informal outdoor play. Unlike highly specialized sports clubs, community programs are designed to be flexible, inclusive, and accessible to all children, regardless of socio-economic background or skill level. They encourage participation by focusing on fun, social interaction, and physical literacy rather than competition or specialization.

Key benefits include:

- Increased Participation and Accessibility: Community sports reach children who are not involved in traditional sports clubs due to financial constraints or lack of local facilities.
- Social Inclusion and Integration: These programs foster social bonds among children and families within neighborhoods, reducing social isolation and promoting cultural integration.
- Physical Literacy and Well-being: Community sports encourage a variety of physical activities, enhancing neuromuscular control and overall fitness without the risks associated with early specialization.
- Cost-Effective for Families: Locally organized sports reduce the need for long-distance travel, decreasing financial burdens on families and promoting environmental sustainability.

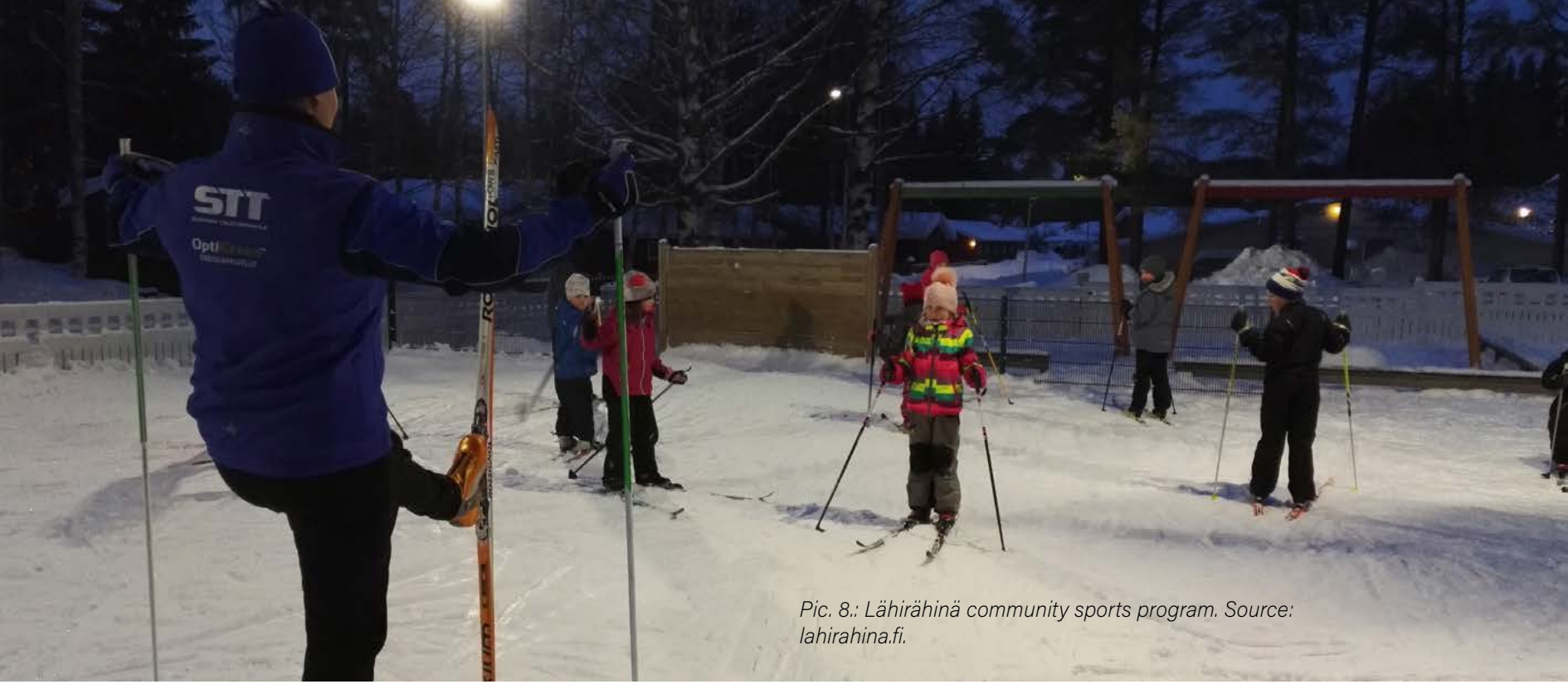
Pic. 6.: Community involvement in the construction of a public playground. Source: Park pohybu Levice.

Best Practices in Community Sports

Several successful community sports initiatives demonstrate the effectiveness of local, inclusive sports models. In Finland, *Lähirähinä* originated in Oulu as a grassroots community sports program aimed at reducing the need for car transportation and promoting independent outdoor play. Emphasizing the idea of "fun, near, together," the program organizes spontaneous, informal sports activities in local parks, schoolyards, and public spaces. It removes participation barriers by requiring no registration or fees, relies on volunteer parents to lead activities, and collaborates with local schools and sports clubs. Its flexible scheduling helps families join without pressure or commitment. The program led to a 48% reduction in chauffeuring children to sports practices and replaced 32% of participation in more distant organized sports. Its greatest impact was social, helping parents and children build stronger community ties, though it faced challenges with sustaining volunteer engagement and consistent funding.

In the United Kingdom, *StreetGames* is a sport-for-development charity that empowers young people in underserved urban areas through its "Doorstep Sport" model. This approach brings sports activities directly to local neighborhoods, making them accessible and relevant to the needs of disadvantaged youth. Programs are offered at low or no cost, removing financial and logistical obstacles,

Pic. 7.: Lähirähinä community sports program. Source: lahirahina.fi.



Pic. 8.: Lähirähinä community sports program. Source: lahirahina.fi.

and are designed to be fun, flexible, and aligned with the interests of young people. StreetGames partners with over 300 community organizations and has engaged over 100,000 youth, establishing 1,000 Doorstep Sports Clubs. The initiative integrates sport with broader goals such as community safety, health, and youth development, with success attributed to a deep understanding of community needs and the use of local volunteers as role models.

In the Netherlands, *Buurtsportcoaches* serve as community sport motivators who connect children and families with local opportunities for physical activity. They work with schools, community centers, and sports clubs to design inclusive sports activities that reflect local needs. These coaches are trained to engage diverse populations, including girls and minority groups, and they focus on integrating physical activity into daily life rather than promoting formal sports participation. Their activities are intentionally fun, social, and low-pressure to encourage lifelong physical activity habits. The initiative has increased physical activity and social cohesion in neighborhoods, fostered community engagement through regular events and participatory planning, and thrived thanks to strong local networks, community involvement, and sustainable funding.

Recommendations for a Systemic Shift

The SIASP report outlines a strategic approach to address the growing inactivity crisis among children and adolescents, calling for a shift away from traditional organized sports toward more inclusive, community-oriented physical activity models. This transformation requires coordinated changes across urban planning, community engagement, parental attitudes, and policy.

To reframe sports and recreation, the report highlights the need to move from specialization to play. Organized, competitive sports alone are insufficient and can even exacerbate inactivity by introducing exclusivity and pressure. Instead, children should be introduced to a variety of sports and recreational activities through sport sampling and community sports to build physical literacy and avoid early specialization injuries. Emphasis should be placed on fun and intrinsic motivation, as enjoyment and social interaction are key drivers of long-term participation. Sports and recreation models should be inclusive, affordable, and community-based, welcoming all children regardless of skill level or socio-economic background.

Urban planning must support cities designed for play and independent mobility. Children's physical activity is strongly influenced by their environment, so cities should be made more child-friendly with safe, inclusive spaces that promote outdoor play and active travel. Active travel networks, such as walking and cycling paths, should connect not only schools but also recreational destinations. Recreation opportunities should be located close to homes to reduce travel needs and support spontaneous participation. Examples include Aspern Seestadt in Vienna, which integrates quality housing with accessible public spaces and travel routes, and Oulu in Finland, which offers a year-round network of 960 km of cycling and walking paths.

Parental attitudes and behaviors are also crucial. Parents should be educated about the mental and physical benefits of independent outdoor play and active travel. Their involvement in community sports programs can foster a more supportive environment for active lifestyles. Families should be encouraged to reduce their dependence on cars by embracing active travel and participating in local sports initiatives.

Lastly, mobility management strategies are essential to make transportation for youth sports more efficient. Community-based sports programs should be designed to reduce travel distances. Collaborating with local authorities can improve access to public transport and active travel infrastructure. Cross-sector collaboration among urban planning, transport, education, and community organizations is key to creating holistic and lasting solutions. A strong example is the JYP-Juniors ice hockey program in Finland, which successfully implemented mobility management by storing equipment at the sports facility and encouraging group cycling and the use of public transportation, significantly reducing car trips.

Conclusion

The SIASP report emphasizes that addressing the inactivity crisis requires a multi-dimensional approach involving urban planning, community engagement, parental mindset changes, and innovative mobility solutions. The shift from organized competitive sports to inclusive, community-based physical activities is necessary to ensure long-term health, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

By adopting these recommendations, cities can create environments that support active, healthy, and happy childhoods, fostering a culture of lifelong physical activity and community well-being.

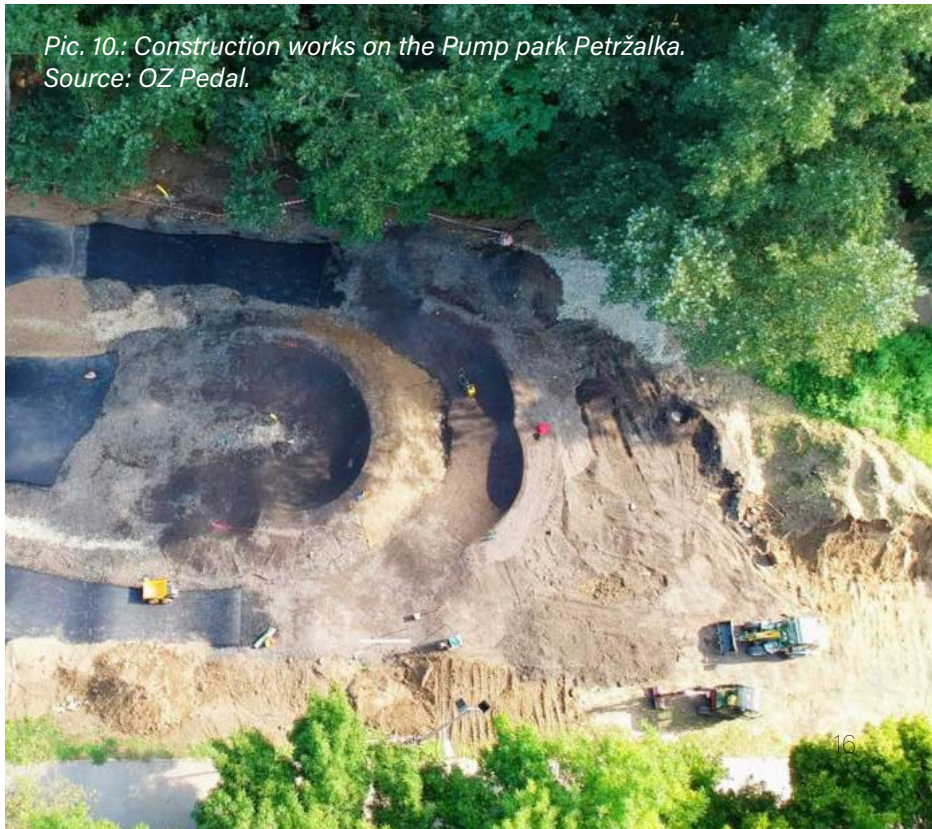
Pic. 9.: Local skatepark in a residential zone of Aspern Seestadt in Vienna. Source: Marek Zahradník.

Community Spaces for Real Change: A look into how modest interventions, driven by people, reshape mobility and independence.

Across Europe, a growing number of local initiatives are proving that accessible, nearby, and community-driven sports spaces can be more effective – and more inclusive – than traditional, centralized facilities. These are not large investments led from above, but modest, often improvised interventions created by people who understand their neighborhoods from within.

The following examples show how small sports and play areas, co-created with residents, can significantly increase children's physical activity, reduce car dependency, and build stronger social ties. From bike playgrounds in Vienna to multifunctional parks in Slovakia, each project offers valuable insights into how public space can support healthy, independent movement – especially for children.

These stories also reveal something deeper: that movement doesn't need to be organized, scheduled, or far from home. Sometimes, all it takes is a nearby space, a shared idea, and a few people who are willing to make it happen.



Pic. 10.: Construction works on the Pump park Petržalka. Source: OZ Pedal.

Pic. 11.: View from above. Source: Park pohybu Levice.

Park pohybu Levice: How a Small Group Made a Big Change

Sports complex on the outskirts of Levice. The first part was built in 2017 and has been developed ever since. It currently includes a skate park (both street and pool), an inline track, a workout and parkour course, a basketball court, a football pitch and a running track. The owner and investor is the municipality. Park pohybu (The Movement Park) is the idea of two active citizens who have been campaigning for its creation for a long time. In addition to the Movement Park, they also organise a Movement festival for young people and mass bike rides to promote active mobility. They have also made two documentaries about their activities (first one and second one).

Marián Kosnovský and Richard Faško are civic activists and founders of Park pohybu in Levice, a multifunctional public sports space born from years of community-driven effort. They began by organizing street festivals to promote alternative sports and gradually transformed their vision into a permanent, inclusive park co-designed with local residents. Photo by: Park pohybu Levice.

Interview with Marián Kosnovský and Richard Faško:

What is the story behind this project? How did it start and why?

Movement Park in Levice was initiated by us, a group of local civic activists who had been organizing the Festival pohybu since 2014 – an event focused on promoting diverse sports such as BMX, skateboarding, parkour, and graffiti. The festivals were held in the town square, free of charge and publicly accessible, aiming to reach the widest audience possible. Over time, a strong community formed around them, which began to consider creating a permanent space – a sports complex that would combine various activities. In 2018, we succeeded in gaining city support, and a multifunctional park was created, with construction funded by the city at approximately 350,000 euros.

How did the idea of the project evolve and improve over time?

What began as a series of festivals gradually turned into a longer-term vision. Proposals for specific sports facilities were developed – ranging from a skatepark and parkour zone to a basketball court, with plans for a pump track and children's playground. The community put pressure on the city through public events, communication with council members, and active citizen engagement. The whole process took more than eight years, with the project moving between various locations before settling in the current Vinohrady neighborhood.

What were the biggest challenges or failures during implementation?

The biggest challenge was advocating for the project within the political environment and negotiating a suitable location. The city initially proposed areas that were unsuitable or subject to other interests. The

park was eventually built, but many planned features – such as the pump track, children's playground, or restrooms – remained only on paper. After a change in city leadership, support significantly declined, and the project gradually faded into the background. The park continues to operate, but it lacks proper care and maintenance.

How did you obtain the necessary permits and approvals? Was that a challenge?

The approval process was lengthy and often accompanied by delays. The project moved between locations several times, plans were repeatedly altered, and the city even paid for studies that were ultimately never realized. However, everything was done in communication with the city, which eventually approved the construction.

How and from where did you obtain funding?

For the first festivals, we obtained funding from the Ministry of Education's KomPrax program – small grants secured through participation by several team members. Later, local businesses joined as sponsors, and the city budget contributed to the park's construction. External funding sources played a key role in the early stages.

What was the cooperation with the local government like? Did they take initiative, or did you have to push them?

City support was the result of intense public pressure. Festival organizers invited city officials to the events, presented the project during a documentary film premiere at the city cinema, communicated with council members, and

Pic. 12.: Slovak Skateboarding Cup 2019. Source: Park pohybu Levice.

Pic. 13.: A two-day streetball tournament organized by a local streetball club. Source: Park pohybu Levice.

filled council meetings with people who came to support the initiative. The city leadership could not ignore the project. However, after a political shift, the attitude changed and cooperation was nearly completely discontinued.

Who are the main users of the sports facility? (age, social groups, gender, etc.)

The space is used by children, youth, and adults – from young skateboarders to parents who spend time with them. Seniors also visit the park, using it as a place for walks. It is an inclusive public space for all age groups.

How does the facility consider the different needs of users?

The park's design was developed in collaboration with the community and users themselves. Many suggestions came from people who actively practice these sports, and their input was incorporated into the plans. The final space includes multiple activity types and aims to accommodate various needs.

Did you notice the facility being used by groups you hadn't expected?

Yes, the park is visited by people of all ages, including seniors who walk there and children from the housing estate who might not otherwise have access to movement or sports. The project had a strong community impact and reached a wider audience than initially anticipated.

How was the local community involved in the development of the project?

The project was born from a grassroots initiative and the community was involved at every step – from planning and communication with the city to physical construction and maintenance. We and other volunteers took care of mowing, organized volunteer days, and monitored tree planting. We also collected feedback, which helped shape the entire project.

How does the facility contribute to building a stronger community?

The park became a place to meet, exercise and spend time together. This has given rise to new civic initiatives that continue in the spirit of the original project. People get to know each other, collaborate, and care for the space together. The project has significantly contributed to strengthening the local community.

What benefits does the facility bring to its users, and what is its long-term contribution?

Users gained access to a free, open sports facility that helps them develop movement skills, spend time actively, and interact with others. For many children and youth, the park was a gateway into sports. Public feedback was highly positive. Festivals had strong attendance, events were full, and the park was used daily. Communication between generations improved, and the overall atmosphere in the neighborhood became more vibrant. The park contributed to a higher quality of life in the city.

What is the state of active mobility in your city, and what transportation challenges emerged in the project?

Active mobility in Levice still has significant shortcomings. There is no connected cycling infrastructure, and no safe or shaded walking paths. The project repeatedly encountered issues with road ownership, lack of municipal willingness, and political disinterest. This led to poor accessibility to the park, especially for unaccompanied children. In response, the community organized so-called "rides" – group bike rides to raise awareness about the need for safe connections. One cycling route was eventually built, but it does not lead directly to the park.

What recommendations would you give to those planning a similar facility? What must not be forgotten, and what would you do differently today?

Pic. 14.: Snapshot from the community park cleanup. Source: Park pohybu Levice

Pic. 15.: Painting games on the sidewalk by local art school students. Source: Park pohybu Levice

The key is to convince people the project is meaningful, gather the right team, and persist through pressure. Sometimes it takes years. It's crucial to ensure maintenance, accessibility for all, community involvement, and long-term sustainability. Today, we might proceed more cautiously, but we wouldn't change our civic commitment – we believe the civic sector should have a fundamental impact on how towns and cities develop. It's also important not to overlook practical elements like lighting, trash bins, shading, and the inclusion of different user groups.

What are the main barriers to supporting an active lifestyle, and what could improve access to sports facilities?

The biggest barriers are lack of support for non-traditional sports, the absence of a systematic national approach, and the weak presence of sports in political decision-making. People often have to rely on cars, and quality infrastructure is lacking. We need urban planning reforms, investment in natural materials and shaded paths, and support for general physical literacy – not just elite sports performance. A better dialogue with communities and support for bottom-up initiatives would be a positive step forward.

What are your hopes for the future of urban sports infrastructure?

We hope that cities will build public spaces that are accessible, inclusive, and multifunctional. We believe the future belongs to children and communities who deserve high-quality public space. We see great value in educating the younger generation and believe that active children can help create a better future.

Pic. 16.: Birdseye view of the whole complex. Source: Park pohybu Levice.

Park pohybu Levice

Country: Slovakia

Keywords: accessible sport facility, skatepark, sport events, community-driven, NGO, cooperation with municipality, promotion of active lifestyle

Contact person: Marián Kosnovský, Richard Faško – founders of the NGO and the idea

Contact email: movementfestival@gmail.com

Link(s): https://www.parkpohybu.sk

Pic. 17.: Pumptrack in the early years. Source: Park pohybu Levice

Ever Tried Navigating Bureaucracy? It's even bumpier than a Pump Track itself!

PumpPark Petržalka is a community-led project that transformed a neglected BMX track in the heart of Petržalka, Bratislava into a unique and modern asphalt pump track – now the largest public facility of its kind in Central Europe. Built by volunteers from the civic association Pedál, the project began in 2014 and took years of persistent effort before finally being completed. Today, the nearly 600-meter-long track offers a vibrant space for cyclists, scooter riders, skateboarders, and skaters of all ages, addressing the chronic lack of public sports infrastructure in the area.

Pic. 18.. View from above. Source: OZ Pedal.

Around the age of forty, she found herself losing interest in managerial roles. That's when her friends gave her a proper bike, suggesting it might last longer than a job title. Since then, she's added three more to her collection and discovered a real passion for road cycling. Although she dove into racing with enthusiasm, she soon realized she wasn't in it for the podium. Instead, she turned her focus to what she does best – leading projects and building things. One of the first outcomes of her volunteer efforts is PumpPark Petržalka, and it's likely just the beginning. Photo by: Eva Uhliariková.

Interview with Eva Uhliariková:

What is the story behind the whole project? How did it start, and why?

The project emerged from discussions within a civic association o. z. Pedál (that in time split into Bajkslava and Karpatské horské) that focused on promoting mobility and outdoor sports for adults. Initially, members were engaged in mountain biking activities, and over time, they realized the need for a dedicated space for cyclists, particularly a pump track.

The idea took shape in an abandoned area that had once hosted a bicross track in the 1990s. As the years passed, the site became overgrown and unused. However, some local enthusiasts continued to ride there informally. Recognizing the potential, the association decided to revitalize the location and transform it into a high-quality sports facility. The process took years of planning, negotiations, and fundraising before the project could finally take off.

How was the idea developed and refined over time?

The initial concept was simply to restore the existing space for biking activities. However, as the idea progressed, it became clear that the project could be much more than just a local track. Discussions with urban planners and cycling experts helped refine the design, ensuring that the facility could meet international standards.

The involvement of local government officials and specialists was crucial in navigating legal requirements and securing permissions. Over time, the project expanded in scope, with additional features such as lighting, improved access roads, and structured training areas being incorporated.

Why do you think the project is successful?

The project's success is due to a combination of strong community involvement, persistence in securing funding, and the ability to overcome bureaucratic hurdles. The pump track is widely used by cyclists of all ages, from young children learning to ride to experienced athletes training for competitions.

Another key factor is that the facility remains open to the public free of charge, making it accessible to everyone. Its strategic location, near key cycling routes, also contributes to its popularity. Most importantly, the space fosters a sense of community, where people of different backgrounds and generations can interact and share their passion for cycling.

What were the biggest challenges or failures during the process?

The most significant challenges were securing permits, obtaining financial support, and maintaining momentum over the years. Navigating bureaucratic procedures took much longer than expected, requiring persistent communication with local authorities.

Funding was another major hurdle. The project required approximately €175,000, which had to be collected through grants, sponsorships, and donations. While some sources provided initial support, the financial burden remained heavy, requiring extensive fundraising efforts.

Additionally, there were logistical challenges in construction. Since the facility was built on a budget, many aspects relied on volunteer labor and donations of materials, which prolonged the development process.

Pic. 19.: One of the events on the pump track. Source: BSK.

Pic. 20.: People from the community help with the construction work. Source: OZ Pedal.

How did you obtain the necessary permits and approvals? Was it a challenge?

Yes, acquiring the necessary permits was a complex and time-consuming process. First, it was necessary to secure a lease for the land, as the site was municipally owned. This required negotiations with the city council, which eventually approved a long-term lease agreement at a symbolic rent of €1 per year.

Once the lease was in place, the project had to undergo various zoning and environmental assessments. One of the key moments was getting the endorsement of the local mayor, which facilitated some bureaucratic processes. Nevertheless, the permitting phase took over a year to complete.

How and from where did you secure the necessary funding?

Funding was secured through a combination of grants, local government contributions, and private sponsorships. Initially, small grants helped cover planning costs. Later, larger contributions came from the City of Bratislava, BSK and private sponsors interested in supporting sports infrastructure.

A major breakthrough was convincing corporate sponsors to contribute to the high-quality track surface, which significantly improved the facility's durability. Despite this, a substantial portion of the work was completed through volunteer efforts, further reducing costs.

How was the cooperation with the local government? Did they get involved on their own initiative, or did you have to motivate them a lot?

At first, local authorities were hesitant, as they were unfamiliar with the concept of a pump track. It took several meetings and presentations to demonstrate the benefits of the project.

Once the idea gained traction, officials became more supportive. The local government did not initiate the project, but once convinced, they facilitated the leasing process and later provided some financial support. However, most of the initiative and advocacy came from the civic association.

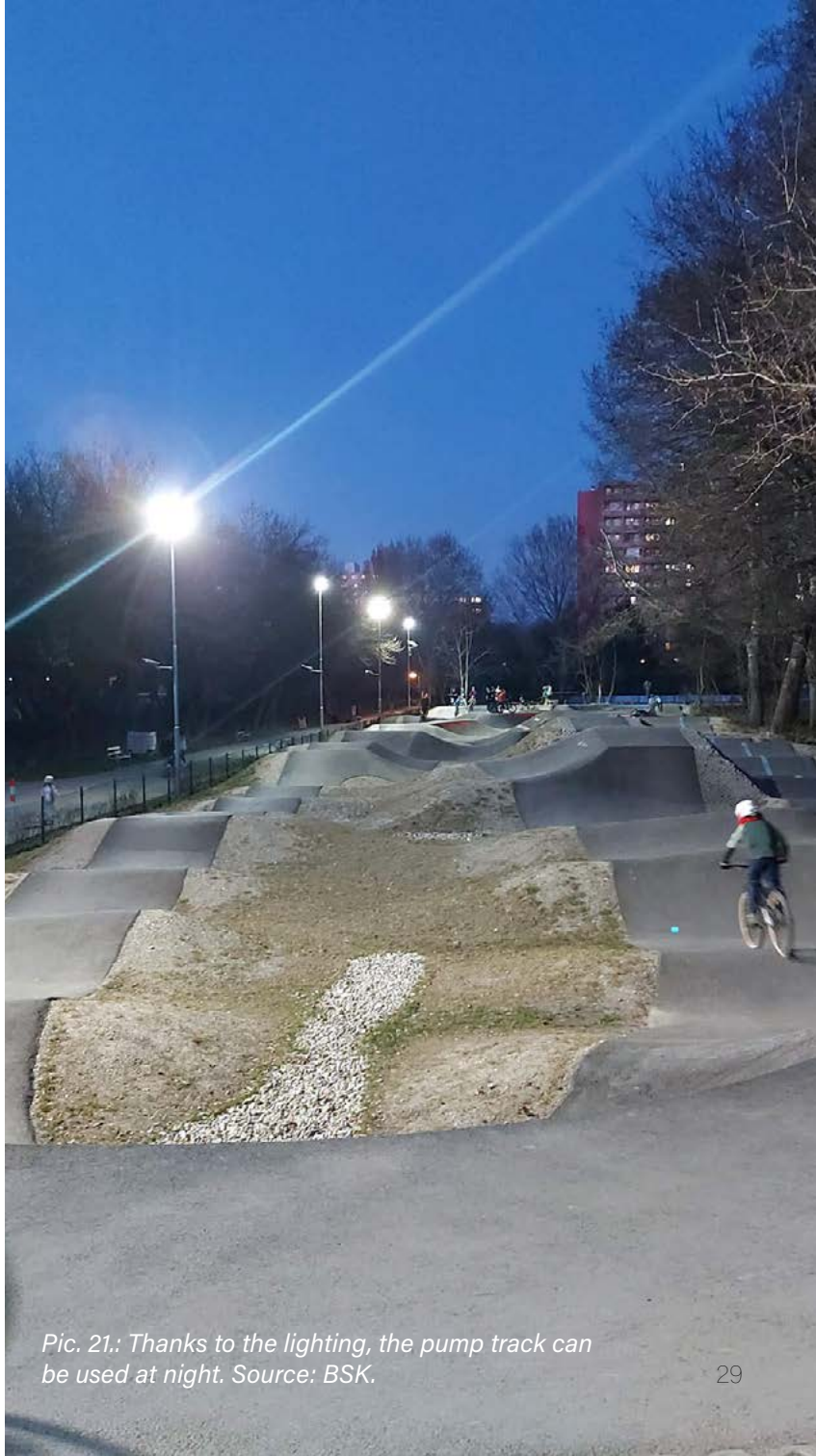
Who are the main users of the facility? (age, social groups, gender, etc.)

The track is used by a diverse group of people. Young children come to learn basic biking skills, while teenagers and young adults use it for BMX and mountain biking practice.

There is also a growing number of female cyclists, though they remain a minority compared to male riders. Additionally, the facility has attracted older cycling enthusiasts, some of whom use it for recreational fitness.

Have you noticed any unexpected groups benefiting from the facility?

Yes, surprisingly, the track has also become a popular spot for scooter riders and even skateboarders. Moreover, some elderly residents from a nearby retirement home have visited, as they enjoy watching young people ride and spend time outdoors. This intergenerational interaction was an unexpected but welcome outcome.



Pic. 21.: Thanks to the lighting, the pump track can be used at night. Source: BSK.

What benefits does the facility bring to its users?

The primary benefit is providing a safe and structured environment for cycling, helping users improve their skills and confidence. The track also encourages physical activity, offering a fun and engaging alternative to traditional sports.

Socially, the facility has fostered a strong sense of community, where regular users form friendships and support each other in their training. Additionally, local cycling clubs have started organizing events and competitions, further increasing the track's impact.

What advice would you give to others planning a similar facility?

A key recommendation is to secure strong community backing and local government support from the start. Having a clear project vision, realistic budget, and timeline is essential.

It is also crucial to think about long-term sustainability. Many projects focus only on construction, but maintenance and operational costs must also be planned for. Ensuring a steady source of funding and a dedicated team to oversee operations will greatly increase the project's longevity and success.

How is accessibility to the facility ensured? What role does active mobility (walking, cycling) play?

The facility is well-connected to existing cycling and pedestrian routes, making it easily accessible without the need for a car. There is a wide pedestrian pathway leading through the housing estate, and a new cycling path has been integrated into the area.

Pic. 22.: Kids together with teens and adults ride here. Source: OZ Pedal.

Pic. 23.: Community cleaning day. Source: OZ Pedal.

Active mobility plays a crucial role, as many visitors arrive by bike or on foot. The proximity to major cycling corridors ensures that the pump track is integrated into the city's broader mobility network. In the future, further improvements in connectivity are planned to enhance accessibility even more.

What is the state of active mobility in your city or municipality?

Active mobility is developing but still faces many challenges. While there are some well-used cycling paths, there is still a need for better infrastructure and safer connections between different parts of the city.

One of the main issues is that not all areas are cyclist-friendly, and there are still gaps in the network. However, there is increasing awareness of the importance of active mobility, and more projects are being planned to support cycling and walking.

Were there any transport-related challenges when designing the project?

Yes, one challenge was ensuring safe access to the facility while balancing different transport modes. Since the facility is near a residential area, it was important to avoid conflicts between cyclists, pedestrians, and cars.

Another issue was that, initially, the connection to the broader cycling network was not ideal. However, over time, improvements have been made, and a new segment of the cycling route was integrated, helping to connect the facility to the main urban cycling paths.

What advice would you give to others planning a similar facility?

The most important advice is to ensure strong cooperation with the local government from the start. Securing land and necessary permits early on can significantly speed up the process.

Another key factor is having a clear vision and involving the community. A successful project needs strong public support, and engaging local sports clubs and volunteers can help sustain the initiative long-term.

Are there any key elements that must not be overlooked?

Yes, maintenance and long-term sustainability are crucial. Many projects focus only on construction but forget about the ongoing costs of upkeep.

Additionally, securing a stable financial source for maintenance and organizing regular events to keep the facility active are essential to ensuring its success over time.

What would you do differently if you were starting over?

One thing I would change is securing a larger initial investment to minimize reliance on volunteer labor. Building high-quality infrastructure from the beginning can save costs in the long run.

Additionally, I would focus more on long-term agreements with the city to ensure stable management and funding.

In your opinion, what are the biggest barriers to promoting an active lifestyle?

One of the biggest barriers is the lack of accessible and well-maintained sports infrastructure. While there are some great facilities, they are often too few or not integrated into everyday urban life.

Another challenge is public awareness. Many people are not familiar with the benefits of cycling and outdoor sports, so education and outreach programs are needed to encourage broader participation.

What changes or policies would help improve access to sports facilities?

A major improvement would be opening more school sports grounds to the public. Many existing sports facilities are underused outside school hours and could be made available to local communities.

Additionally, policies that support multi-use public spaces and better funding for community-led sports projects would significantly improve accessibility.

What are your hopes for the future of urban sports infrastructure?

I hope to see cities prioritizing active mobility and integrating sports facilities into urban planning. Infrastructure should not only be focused on cars but should encourage walking, cycling, and outdoor activities.

With proper investment and planning, urban sports facilities can become vibrant spaces that support healthier lifestyles, stronger communities, and a more sustainable city environment.

PumpPark Petržalka

Country: Slovakia

Keywords: accessible sport facility, pump track, community-driven, DIY, cooperation with municipality

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Pic. 24.: One of the events on the pump track. Source: BSK.

Pic. 25.: Source: City of Trnava.

Co-Designing Joy: Public Spaces Reimagined by Trnava's Citizens

Trnava is an example of one of the most active cities in Slovakia in terms of developing conditions for sport and active mobility. The municipality is creating high-quality opportunities for physical activity by renovating publicly accessible schoolyards, inner blocks and public spaces, as well as the sports infrastructure itself. The projects aim to involve local communities and the public. At the same time, there is a usable network of cycling infrastructure in the city, and the city encourages cycling in other ways – such as providing bicycles for students.

She started working for the City of Trnava in 2019 as a coordinator of participatory budgeting and has been working on the participation agenda until today. She has experience in various ways of involving citizens and professionals in municipal projects. These include various surveys, smaller groups of citizens, focus groups, larger forums or internal processes within the local government. She is co-founder and editor of the participation portal planujmesto.trnava.sk. She lives in Trnava, is a mother of two children and cares about a safe and healthy urban environment. Photo by: Ivana Vidová.

Interview with Ivana Vidová:

When and why did the city decide to systematically involve residents in the planning of municipal projects?

The participatory process in Trnava began to take shape in 2016 when newly elected mayor Peter Bročka introduced the topic of citizen engagement into municipal politics. The first tool was a participatory budget, which functioned successfully for several years and sparked public interest in city affairs. In the same year, the city also launched participatory planning focused on a broader urban context. A key moment came in 2020, when the pandemic made in-person meetings impossible. The city then decided to transform the participatory process. However, the pandemic wasn't the only reason for this change – there was also a sense of "topic fatigue," and the platform no longer delivered the same innovation it once had. Drawing on past experience, the "Plan the City" platform was created, initially aimed at investment prioritization. Residents could propose their own ideas and comment on existing projects. An information portal – planujmesto.trnava.sk – was also created to share updates about the projects and their status.

How has the city's participatory methodology for planning public spaces evolved?

Participation in the city evolved from simple tools like participatory budgeting and surveys to complex processes involving targeted meetings, workshops, and both online and field surveys. Currently, participation takes place as early as the project pre-preparation phase, especially for courtyards and public spaces. It is conducted through resident meetings, surveys, presentations of architectural designs, and the collection of feedback throughout multiple stages of the design process.

What have been the biggest challenges in setting up the participatory process?

Major challenges included phasing out and transforming the participatory budget, which had begun to see repetitive topics and recurring organizations whose projects overlapped with the city's grant schemes. Coordinating large investment projects in a participatory mode was also complex, compounded by limited time and human resources.

How does the city obtain the necessary permits and approvals for projects that emerge from public participation? Is it more difficult than for standard investment projects?

Projects emerging from participatory processes go through the same permitting procedures as standard investments. If a project is not ready for implementation, the city does not allocate funding for it. Participation usually occurs even before the project assignment is formalized, making its outputs a foundation for further project development.

How does the city finance projects that come from public engagement? Are there special funds for this or is it covered by the general budget?

Initially, the participatory budget for Trnava had its own separate line item in the city's budget for public-proposed projects. For participatory planning, standard municipal budget lines apply, depending on the type of investment. Participation is "only" the method of project creation, not of financing. However, the city extensively uses external funding sources, which is possible thanks to the preparedness and quality of its projects.

Pic. 26.: Participatory meeting. Source: City of Trnava.

Pic. 27.: City stall at the event Trnavský Rínek. Source: City of Trnava.

Which groups of residents are most active in participatory planning for public spaces? (age, social groups, families with children, seniors, etc.)

The most active are families with children, seniors, and residents directly affected by the planned spaces. Also involved are grandparents accompanying children to playgrounds and residents of buildings around courtyards.

How does the city ensure that diverse groups of residents – including those who typically don't participate – are heard?

The city reaches out to the public directly. For courtyard renewals, residents are invited to public meetings. The city visits senior centers, schools (speaking with children and staff), and talks to parents on playgrounds. Opinions and needs are gathered in the field, directly within neighborhoods and target areas.

Do you observe differences in the needs and preferences of residents in different parts of Trnava when planning recreational spaces?

Yes, differences in preferences are evident. Some groups favor workout equipment; others seek calm spaces or shade. People often visit favorite locations even from other parts of the city – for specific playgrounds, they travel as if on a small excursion. We call this "playground tourism."

What tools and methods does Trnava use to engage residents in planning public spaces such as playgrounds and sports areas?

The city uses online questionnaires, public meetings, workshops with children, consultations with teachers, and cooperates with Trnava University and nonprofit organizations. It presents architectural studies and holds discussions with architects. Surveys have also been conducted with cyclists and other specific target groups.

How does the city evaluate public opinions and suggestions? What criteria determine which ideas get implemented or incorporated into plans?

Public suggestions are evaluated continuously, depending on the type and stage of the project. In courtyard projects, resident input is collected through surveys or meetings, then compiled into a report that serves as a brief for architects. Decisions on which ideas to pursue further depend on practical criteria: project readiness, available funding, staff capacity, and whether the proposal is technically and legally feasible. Not all ideas can be implemented immediately, but if they have public support and align with city planning, they can return in future project cycles.

Pic. 28.: Small focus group on the topic of bicycle commuting. Source: City of Trnava.

Pic. 29.: Realized Agátka project. Source: City of Trnava.

Can you give specific examples of projects in Trnava where public participation significantly influenced the final design?

Yes, for example, courtyard revitalizations like the one on Hospodárska Street, where playgrounds for various age groups were combined based on feedback from families, grandparents, and seniors. In the Agátka project, a stream and pond were built in the middle of a housing estate, and residents contributed to shaping the area. There was also intensive participation in the renewal of the school campus on Atómová Street, with meetings between teachers and architects. Children, parents, and teachers were involved in planning traffic calming and the school entrance at Gorkého. A more complex but important process was the regulation of parking – despite strong emotions, residents had the chance to comment on proposed changes and speak directly with designers at public meetings.

How does Trnava account for active mobility (walking, cycling) when planning playgrounds and sports spaces?

Active mobility is supported mainly through sidewalk repairs and new cycling routes. The city aims to connect different parts of Trnava so they are accessible by foot or bike.

Do you believe that access to sports areas and playgrounds near people's homes actually influences how parents and children spend their free time?

Yes, access to playgrounds and sports facilities significantly influences leisure habits. It's highly individual. Some parents prefer nearby playgrounds, while others choose locations with specific features their children like – even if it means traveling across the city.

What would you recommend to other cities seeking to improve public participation in planning public spaces? What are the key success factors?

The foundation of successful participation is political will and active support from city leadership. Without this, it's very difficult or impossible. It's also essential to have a dedicated team – ideally at least two or three people – working systematically on participation. Sufficient funding is also crucial. We recommend starting public engagement as early as possible – even before drafting the brief – and using tools tailored to each target group. Trust between local government staff and residents, along with clear communication, helps set realistic expectations and build long-term relationships.

What are the main barriers to more effective citizen involvement in planning public spaces?

There's no legislation in Slovakia requiring cities to involve the public – no mandatory budget allocation for participation as exists in Poland, for example. A Charter on Participatory Budgeting was once in progress with the Plenipotentiary's Office, but its status is unclear. Another major barrier is the lack of human resources – participation takes time and expertise, and without proper staffing, quality cannot be achieved.

What are your visions for the future of participatory planning in Trnava?

The city's vision is to incorporate participation into the renewal of as many public spaces as possible. Our goal is to ensure maximum accessibility and participation across all generations. We aim to complete ongoing projects while continuing to engage the public on new challenges. In addition to traditional feedback collection, we also meet people at informal city events like the Trnava Market and the Traditional Trnava Fair. Visitors can stop by, chat, share opinions, or mark on a "feeling map" where in the city they feel good, see problems, or would welcome changes. It's an approachable and personal form of communication in a pleasant, community-oriented atmosphere.

Pic. 30.: Participatory sessions with different groups. Source: City of Trnava.

Participatory planning in the city of Trnava

Country: Slovakia

Keywords: accessible sport facilities, cycling infrastructure, municipality, participative planning, playgrounds, school yards

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Pic. 31.: Participatory workshop about parking, greenery and community spaces in Kopánka neighbourhood. Source: City of Trnava.

Pic. 32.: Radmotorikpark Kaisermühlen on the Danube riverbank is the larger of the two bicycle playgrounds. Source: Alec Hager, Radvokaten.

Radspielplatz – Bicycle playgrounds in Vienna

Publicly accessible bicycle playgrounds serve to develop cycling skills and can also be a fun physical activity. In the city of Vienna, two permanent bicycle playgrounds have been created, which are supplemented by temporary ones.

Active in the field of cycling and transport policy since 2004. Founder and director of 'Radvokat:innen – agency for mobility' and former spokesperson of 'Radlobby Austria' cycling advocacy. Head of the cycling school 'FahrSicherRad.' Coordinator and co-founder of the platform 'Radkompetenz Österreich.' Developer of the concept 'Radspielplatz Wien' for cycling playgrounds in Vienna and Graz. Operator of the collective cargobike research platform 'KlimaEntLaster.' Former federal supervisor of the national cycling campaign 'Österreich radelt' until 2021. Member of the 'CycleCinemaClub' and passionate cycle traveller. Photo by Alec Hager, Radvokaten.

Interview with Alec Hager:

What is the story behind the project? How did it start and what was the initial idea?

The project started from a specific need in Vienna. We are running a cycling school for kids and so we realized there was no safe space to teach kids how to cycle. In Vienna, cycling in parks is not legally allowed, and the cycling infrastructure is mostly not suitable for children. Around 2015, we identified a significant lack of safe spaces for children to learn cycling and for parents to freely allow their kids to practice. Additionally, many parents in Vienna do not cycle themselves, so teaching their kids to cycle is not an obvious priority for them.

During this period, I attended a presentation at the VeloCity conference, where I saw a concept of Danish cycling playgrounds. Inspired by this, I thought about developing a fixed location in Vienna where children could have a designated place to learn cycling.

There was also a city competition by the Vienna Agency for Economics, which encouraged ideas to make the city more child friendly. I submitted my concept, won both the jury and public voting, and received prize money and exposure. This helped bring the project to the attention of city officials and other stakeholders.

How did the project develop from idea to realization?

Winning the competition provided some funding, which I used for a study trip to Denmark. I examined several cycling playgrounds they had already built and took inspiration from different concepts. Some designs were too rural or focused on off-road paths, which wouldn't be suitable for teaching children how to cycle in an urban environment.

The next major step came in 2019 when a district mayor in Vienna launched an idea competition, promising to implement the most popular project. A local bicycle shop owner entered my project, and it won the vote. This led to the city administration committing to building a cycling playground as part of the 2020 election campaign. The result was a large cycling playground "Radmotorikpark Kaisermühlen" at the Danube, which opened just before the elections.

A second cycling playground was later developed by us in Seestadt Aspern, where planners of this large urban development project wanted to include a cycling playground for kids in a large recreational area. This project involved an architect and detailed planning processes.

What was the process for obtaining permits and approvals?

In the case of the first large playground at the Danube, the city handled all the necessary permits and approvals, I was not directly involved in the planning process. However, for the Seestadt Aspern project, we had to go through official approval procedures. This included compliance with Austrian safety regulations, specifically those for playgrounds.

One major requirement was getting approval from TÜV, a technical safety certification body. They reviewed our design, ensured all obstacles met safety standards, and provided feedback. Adjustments were made based on their recommendations, such as making some elements smoother and removing any potentially hazardous features. The process took around two months but was spread out over a year due to overall construction timelines.

Pic. 33.: Vienna's cycling school for children. Source: Alec Hager, Radvokaten.

How was the local community involved in the project?

For our first prototype in 2019 we incorporated input from school children and cycling trainers to ensure the design was functional and we made several prototypes for them to test. However, there was no broad participatory planning. In Graz, where a next Radspielplatz is in development, we proposed a more inclusive approach by engaging local school children in designing the space and temporary installations. Unfortunately, bureaucratic delays have prevented this process from moving forward. But we know from our work as cycling teachers what kids like to use and have fun with.

Who are the main users of the cycling playgrounds?

There are two main types of users. The first are school classes that attend structured cycling training sessions organized by the city, usually for children aged 8 to 10. These programs help many complete beginners learn how to cycle.

The second group consists of families who visit the playgrounds in their free time. The large playground at the Danube is particularly popular due to its accessibility and combination of cycling playground and pump track. Families bring children of different ages, allowing older kids to use the pump track while younger ones practice on the playground. The Seestadt Aspern playground is also used by local families, but since it lacks a pump track and is further away from the city center, it doesn't attract as many visitors from outside the neighborhood.

Pic. 34.: Radmotorikpark Kaisermühlen. Source: Alec Hager, Radvokaten.

Pic. 35.: Aspern seestadt playground – the smaller of Vienna's two bicycle playgrounds. Source: Alec Hager, Radvokaten.

How accessible are the playgrounds, and were there any transport-related challenges?

Accessibility is a crucial factor. The Seestadt Aspern playground is directly under a subway station, making it very easy to reach. The Danube playground is also well connected by public transport and located in a recreational area.

However, some locations have accessibility challenges. One possible site in Graz is surrounded by major roads with no safe cycling infrastructure, meaning a cycling path must be built before the playground can be useful. In rural areas, accessibility is even more difficult, as most people would drive to such a facility when there are no cycling paths.

What advice would you give to others planning a similar project?

It is important to clearly define the target group, as a cycling playground for beginners aged 2-8 differs from a pump track for older children. Sufficient space of at least 600-1000 square meters should be ensured. The playground should be easily reachable by bike or public transport. It is essential to provide shade and water, as concrete surfaces can become too hot in summer. A combination of basic cycling elements with pump track features can make the experience more engaging.

To increase functionality and accessibility, it is important that these facilities include diverse elements, such as plastic or wooden obstacles from specialized manufacturers. Additionally, playgrounds should not be overcrowded with structures; children need open space to move freely. Simple visual guides, like painted lines on the ground, can help them navigate while maintaining flexibility in their movement.

What are the biggest barriers to promoting cycling among children?

The biggest challenge today is the prevalence of smartphones, which reduces physical activity in general. Beyond that, the urban environment plays a crucial role. If the city is designed around cars, children do not have safe opportunities to cycle independently.

Additionally, parental attitudes can be a barrier. Some parents do not cycle themselves, some parents are overly cautious and prefer to drive their kids everywhere, limiting their opportunities to develop independent mobility. However, this caution is often justified due to real safety concerns in car-dominated cities.

What policy changes would help improve children's access to cycling infrastructure?

Cities should integrate cycling into urban planning policies by designing new developments with car-free zones where children can move freely. Every neighborhood should have accessible play areas. A master plan should be created to ensure safe cycling facilities. This is similar to how Austrian cities previously built public swimming pools to teach children how to swim. In the past, municipalities recognized the need to teach children how to swim to prevent drowning, so they invested in public pools and school swimming programs. Cycling could be treated similarly, with dedicated infrastructure to ensure every child can learn to cycle safely.

One good example was a master plan in Bern, Switzerland, which aimed to create a network of cycling facilities for children. However, due to budget constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic, the project stalled.

Pic. 36.: Tram tracks at the Aspern seestadt playground. Source: Alec Hager, Radvokaten.

Additionally, when designing playgrounds, planners should prioritize movement flow and usability. Many poorly designed spaces fail because they are not built with children's actual needs in mind. If a facility isn't engaging or lacks accessibility, it simply won't be used.

What are your hopes for the future in this area?

I hope to see cities develop a well-connected network of cycling facilities. And transform the public space into a liveable area with sufficient cycle infrastructure, reduced car traffic or car-free zones. If cycling is treated with the same importance, children will have more opportunities to develop independence and physical activity in a safe environment. Additionally, city planners should focus on ensuring well-designed and accessible cycling spaces that truly meet the needs of young learners.

Pic. 37.: Testing proposed obstacles with children. Source: Alec Hager, Radvokaten.

Radspielplatz Vienna

Country: Austria

Keywords: active mobility, bicycle playground, accessible sport facility, skills development, cycling, municipality

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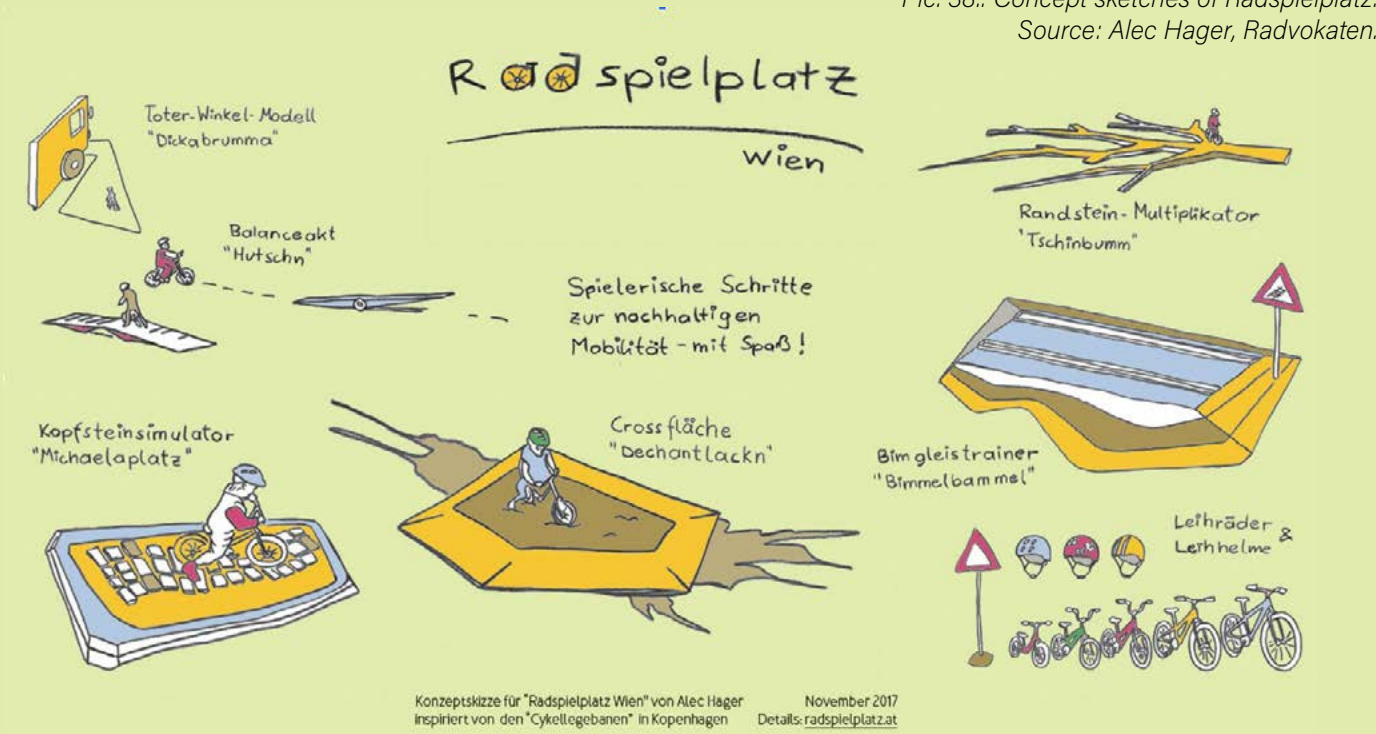


Pic. 38.: Concept sketches of Radspielplatz. Source: Alec Hager, Radvokaten.

Pic. 39.: Source: Jozef Šteffek, Juraj Palaj.

Malinovo in Motion: How Residents Are Building Sports Facilities Together

"Malinovčania pre Malinovo" is an initiative of the inhabitants of the village of Malinovo (Bratislava region, 4,000 inhabitants) who are committed to improving their village, especially through projects that promote sport and physical activity. In 2021, the volunteers revitalised a run-down hockey rink and added a shooting range, covering the costs through crowdfunding and direct contact with local businesses. Similarly, it has crowdfunded the renovation of a multi-purpose artificial turf pitch in 2022. It is also focusing on active mobility and has built bicycle parking and public bicycle service stations.

Jozef Šteffek (left) and Juraj Palaj (right) are civic activists from Malinovo, Slovakia, who have led several community-driven projects focused on developing public sports facilities. Together with local residents, they built hockey, basketball, football, and other recreational spaces that are now used daily by people of all ages. Their work demonstrates how grassroots initiatives and community collaboration can significantly improve the quality of life in a municipality. Photos by Jozef Šteffek and Juraj Palaj.

Interview with Juraj Palaj and Jozef Šteffek:

What is the story behind this project? How did it start and why?

The initial spark came from a simple need – as Malinovo grew, especially with families with children, it lacked spaces for sports and leisure. A group of locals came together and, with great dedication, built a street hockey rink on a parking lot using their own financial contributions and small grants. Step by step, more initiatives followed: a football field, basketball court, workout zone, training field, beach volleyball area, and smaller interventions like bike stands, shelters at bus stops, benches, and signs.

How did the idea develop and improve over time?

The idea evolved organically and in stages. Each new facility or upgrade responded to the needs of the people, often driven by specific groups (e.g. football fans). The team sought grants, connected with the community, volunteers, and the local government. Repairs and improvements were made through volunteer work, community fundraisers, and crowdfunding. A key element was that people came forward with ideas and supported each other. For example, they even managed to prepare project documentation to expand the local sports club building, which the municipality took to the construction permit phase.

Why do you think the project is successful?

The sports facilities are in daily use, often from morning until evening. Children visit after school, spend time there during afterschool programs, and locals gather to socialize. The hockey and basketball courts are lively; the training field was literally built from the ground up, leveled with 50 truckloads of soil. People came to help – sometimes just for a schnitzel and potato salad, but they came. It all emerged from the grassroots, and it makes a real difference.

How did you finance the project?

Funding came from multiple sources – crowdfunding, the municipality's participatory budget, small grants from foundations (ZSE, Orange, Transpetrol, BSK), sponsorships from local businesses, and often personal funds. Team members contributed from their own companies or family budgets.

What was the cooperation with the local government like? Did they initiate anything, or did they need convincing?

Sometimes the municipality joined in, especially once a project was already developed and had public support. Other times, it was easier to get things done as a citizen initiative. Municipal leaders often lacked ideas or capacity, and frequent leadership changes and short 4-year terms disrupted continuity. Still, a participatory budget was introduced, and some projects made it to the construction phase with municipal help.

Who uses the sports facilities and how are they adapted to different groups?

Malinovo's sports facilities are open and accessible to everyone – kids, teens, parents, working adults, and older residents. Everyone can find their space. Over time, design adjustments reflected various needs – safe bike racks for children, barriers to prevent bikes from entering courts, adjustable basketball hoop heights, or better surface quality.

Pic. 40.: Surface treatment of the new multifunctional playground. Source: Jozef Šteffek, Juraj Palaj.

A key sign of a successful space was always daily use. Unexpectedly, the courts became meeting spots even for groups not originally targeted – like seniors who came just to sit, or children who wouldn't otherwise engage in sports. These places naturally evolved into intergenerational and inclusive community hubs.

How did the local community influence the development and design of the spaces? How did this contribute to building a stronger community?

The community was involved from the very beginning – people contributed materials, helped with construction, planted trees, painted, and organized activities. Some sports areas wouldn't exist without parents or neighbors who wanted something for their children and surroundings. User feedback had a real impact – for example, details like irrigation, surfaces, or barriers were adjusted. The best-designed spaces were those that naturally filled with people. Such places connect kids and adults, neighbors and strangers. Many met through these activities for the first time and formed groups that still exist. Often, it started with one person saying, "Let's give it a try" – and others followed.

How do you evaluate the impact of the sports facilities – do you have data or observe long-term effects?

Although there is no hard data or systematic monitoring, everyday use, busy courts, and positive feedback are the best indicators. Sometimes issues like noise or maintenance come up – which only confirms that the spaces are alive. Over time, it's clear that kids have a place to spend time off screens, new social connections form, people meet, talk, and move.

Pic. 41.: New multifunctional playground completed. Source: Jozef Šteffek, Juraj Palaj.

What is the accessibility of the facilities and how is active mobility in the village?

Access is poor, especially for cycling and safe pedestrian movement. The village lacks proper infrastructure – no bike lanes, and pedestrians often walk on roads without sidewalks or safe connections. Although several solutions were proposed in the past, most were never realized. Citizen initiatives repeatedly stress the need for better cycling and pedestrian accessibility, but active mobility requires consistent municipal support, political will, and long-term planning.

Were there any transportation-related challenges in the project?

Yes, one specific example was a planned bike path between schools. The project was ready, but the municipality ultimately decided to pave the area and return it to car parking. Instead of supporting safe routes for kids and cyclists, car traffic was prioritized. This case highlights common obstacles – shifting priorities, bureaucracy, and lack of coordination, which ultimately hinder the development of active mobility.

What advice would you give to those planning similar facilities?

Lead by example. Go into it knowing it won't be easy, but it's worth it. Don't rely solely on the municipality – the best results come from what people create themselves. Organize work brigades, fundraisers, reach out to friends, collaborate. Having a clear goal and a specific target group – like parents – helps a lot.

Pic. 42.: Workout playground under construction. Source: Jozef Šteffek, Juraj Palaj.

What shouldn't be forgotten when planning sports areas, and what would you do differently today?

It's essential to think about practical details – irrigation, quality surfaces, bins, lighting, regular maintenance, and accessibility. It must truly serve those who use it, not just exist as a "project on paper." But most important is energy and willpower – time always shows what works. What is meaningful and supported by people will find its place and stay.

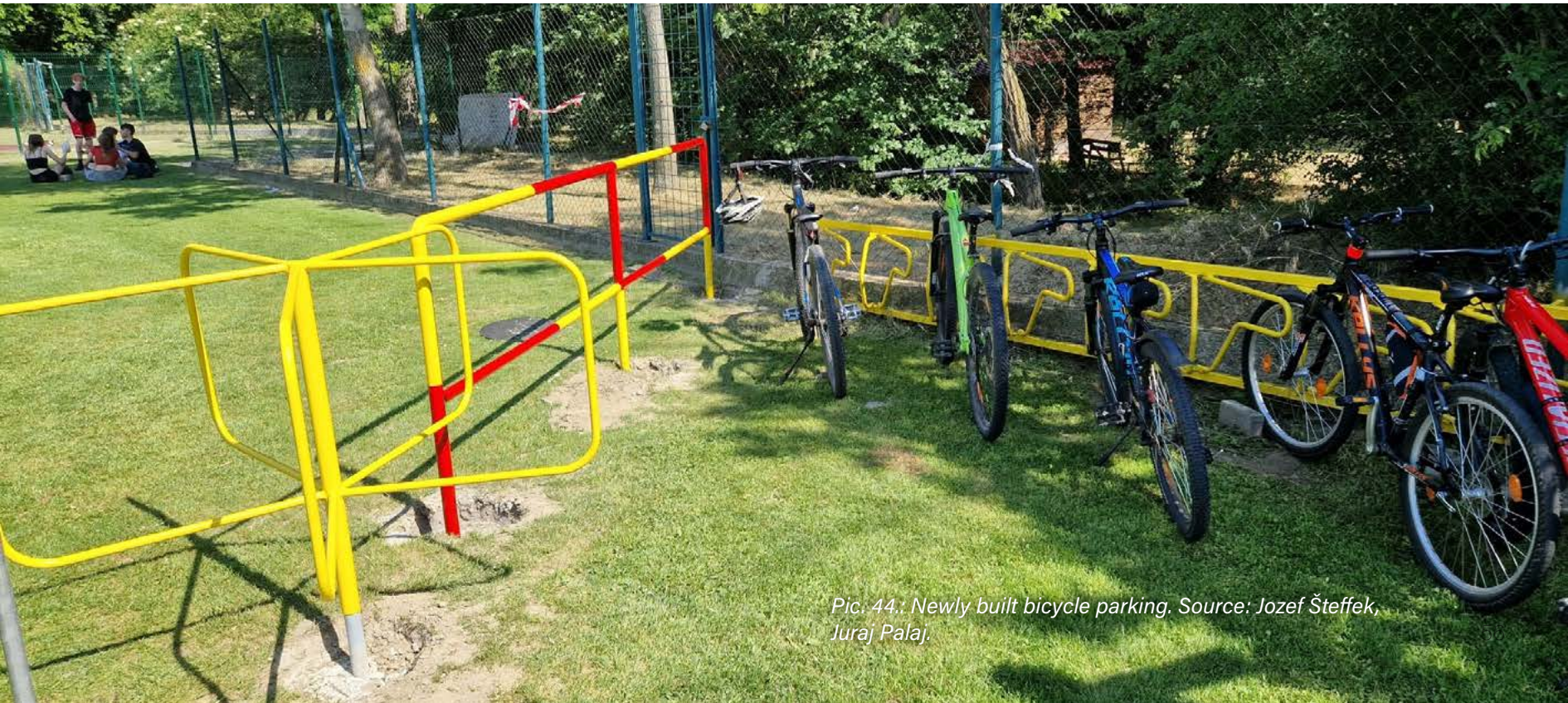
What are the main barriers to developing an active lifestyle and what could improve access to sports facilities?

Major barriers include bureaucracy, weak infrastructure, lack of interest or engagement from local governments, and short political cycles that disrupt continuity. People often want to take action, but the system gets in the way. Improvements could come through better planning, zoning changes, systematic support for cycling, and above all, regular maintenance of existing spaces. Creating small technical crews, e.g. from retired residents, could help handle ongoing repairs and public space care efficiently and without unnecessary delays.

Pic. 43.: Reconstruction of the old hockey rink.
Source: Jozef Šteffek, Juraj Palaj.

What are your hopes for the future of local sports infrastructure?

We hope more spaces will emerge based on real community needs. Everyone must recognize the value of quality public spaces. Above all, we believe in people – when they come together and decide to do something for the common good, things start to move. When we see something isn't working or something is missing, we simply gather, solve, build, fundraise, and fix. You don't need big budgets or complex structures – just will, a shared goal, and willingness to help. That's how change happens, step by step.



Pic. 44.: Newly built bicycle parking. Source: Jozef Šteffek, Juraj Palaj.

Malinovo in Motion

Country: Slovakia

Keywords: accessible sport facilities, hockey, community, fundraising, crowdfunding, active mobility

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Pic. 45.: Source: Jozef Šteffek, Juraj Palaj.

Pic. 46.: Born to Trick challenge 2018 event in the park. Source: Marián Kališ.

Born to Trick Park: The Story of a Parkour Community Sports Space in Trenčín

Born to Trick Park in Trenčín was created by a local parkour community seeking a space to move and train outside of formal sports facilities. Built with the help of volunteers, local companies, and a civic association, the park features natural materials and responds to the riverside environment near the Váh. Over time, it evolved into a space for training sessions, summer events, and everyday relaxation for people of all ages. Now part of a broader city-led riverbank revitalization project, the park stands as a testament to how small, community-driven initiatives can shape public space and foster social connection.

Jakub Halgoš is one of the founders of the Born to Trick Park and a lifelong athlete with over 18 years of professional experience in parkour and freerunning. He is also a co-founder and parkour coach at Plejs for Movement, a movement studio in Trenčín, where he works as a strength and conditioning trainer for children and youth. In addition, he serves as the sports and youth officer at the Trenčín City Hall, where he is dedicated to promoting sports and a healthy lifestyle among residents of Trenčín and the surrounding region. Photo by Jakub Halgoš.

Interview with Jakub Halgoš:

What is the story behind this project? How did it start and why?

The parkour and workout park in Trenčín was initiated by a small group of young people who wanted to create their own space for training outside of formal city facilities. The idea gradually evolved from the simple desire to have a place for movement into a collaboration with the civic association "Pre prírodu," which was focused on revitalizing the floodplain along the Váh River. The elements of the park were designed with an emphasis on natural materials and adapted to local conditions – for example, to the direction of the river flow due to the risk of flooding. Most of the work was carried out by the group itself with the help of volunteers, local companies, and friends.

How did the project idea develop and improve over time?

The original concept expanded over time to include training sessions, summer competitions, and camps. The park found its place among different age groups and functioned as a community space. Currently, its revitalization is part of a broader municipal project focused on restoring the riverbanks and floodplain of the Váh River, carried out within the framework of the European Capital of Culture initiative. This project will bring new features, improved infrastructure, public lighting, and better connections to surrounding areas.

Why do you think the project is successful?

The project had a strong community impact – it became a place for gatherings, physical activity, and summer events. Although it is not as active as it once was, various groups of people still visit occasionally, and it remains a known point in the city's public space.

What were the biggest challenges or failures during implementation?

The biggest challenge was long-term maintenance. Because of the use of natural materials, regular upkeep was necessary, which was time-consuming and physically demanding. As the initial enthusiasm faded, the park entered a less maintained phase. Systemic elements like lighting, trash collection, and mowing were also missing – these were not provided by the city since the land did not belong to municipal property.

How did you obtain the necessary permits and approvals? Was it difficult?

The administrative and contractual agenda was handled by the civic association "Pre prírodu," which negotiated with the landowners – local land associations. The city did not own the land, so long-term lease agreements had to be signed.

How and from where did you secure the necessary funding?

Funding came from multiple sources – partly self-funded, partly through an EU grant, and partly thanks to sponsors and donations from friends and local companies. Donated materials from partners were also used.

What was the cooperation with the local government like? Did they get involved on their own or had to be motivated?

Initially, cooperation with the municipality was minimal. Since the land was not owned by the city, the local government did not actively participate. Today, the author of the project is employed by the city, and the park is part of a municipal initiative, which has led to closer collaboration. However, the original community still manages the park.

Pic. 47.: Born to Trick Park. Source: Erik Stopka.

Who are the main users of the sports facility? (age, social groups, gender, etc.)

From the beginning, the park was intended for all age groups. It was used by children, parents, seniors, training groups, and random passers-by. Later, boxers and recreational athletes also started using the space – for instance, by installing punching bags. The space was open and community-oriented.

How does the facility meet the needs of different users?

The park was designed flexibly, without being assigned to a specific target group. Users naturally adapted it to their needs by installing new elements or modifying their training styles.

How was the local community involved in the development of the project, and how did it influence the final design?

The project arose directly from the community's initiative. The design, visualization, and implementation were the result of the founders' own efforts, supported by local volunteers. Due to the grassroots nature of the initiative, contact with users was natural and continuous. People got involved spontaneously – bringing ideas, improvements, and actively participating in the park's development and maintenance.

Pic. 48.: Born to Trick challenge 2016. Source: Marián Kališ.

How does the facility contribute to building a stronger community?

The park became a space for summer meetups, training sessions, competitions, and camps. It helped build intergenerational community ties. Even though its activity has since slowed down, it remains evidence that such places make sense, even if just for a limited period.

What benefits does the facility offer its users, and what is its long-term impact?

Born to Trick Park offered not only a space for physical activity but also a place for rest, socializing, and community connection. During its most active period, it has attracted hundreds of people from across the city, becoming a key part of community life. Although no formal data collection accompanied the project, high attendance and positive feedback confirmed its value. The park helped raise awareness of the need for an active lifestyle and highlighted the role of public spaces where movement, community, and well-being naturally go together.

How is access to the park ensured? What role does active mobility play (walking, cycling)?

Access was initially limited – possible only from the Zamarovce side. Footbridges were planned, and later a better connectivity was discussed through a nearby railway bridge. After its revitalization, the park will be more accessible, also from the city's eastern riverbank.

What is the state of active mobility in your city, and what transportation challenges did the project face?

Pic. 49.: Born to Trick Park. Source: Erik Stopka.

Active mobility in Trenčín is gradually improving, but there is still room for growth. The city is working on new cycling routes and pedestrian links to better connect public, recreational, and sports areas. One of the biggest challenges in the Born to Trick Park project was its accessibility. At first, it could only be accessed from one side, and there was no direct connection from the city. Proposals for pedestrian and cycling bridges existed for some time, but progress came with the Fiesta Bridge project, which aims to connect the city center with the opposite bank of the Váh River. Designed as a barrier-free, non-motorized crossing, the new bridge will significantly improve access to the area, including the workout park, and promote walking and cycling as part of everyday urban life.

What advice would you give to others planning a similar facility? What should not be overlooked, and what would you do differently today?

A successful project needs accessible land and funding. Municipal support increases the chances of success and sustainability. From the beginning, it's essential to think not only about construction but also about long-term operation and maintenance. While natural materials like wood look nice and eco-friendly, they require demanding upkeep and have a shorter lifespan – more durable materials would likely be used today. Practical features like lighting, trash bins, and barrier-free access must not be forgotten. It's also important to consider diverse user needs and create a multifunctional space that can serve a wide range of people.

Pic. 50.: Born to Trick challenge 2019 – winner of the Best Female in Calisthenics trophy. Source: Marián Kališ.

What are the main barriers to supporting an active lifestyle, and what could improve access to sports facilities?

One challenge is that sport and active living are not always reflected as strategic priorities in city development. Systematic planning and expert collaboration are often lacking, which can result in public spaces that are underused or poorly designed. There is a need for long-term strategies based on real community needs. A positive development has been the establishment of the city's participation unit, which helps facilitate communication with the public. Projects rooted in people's actual demands have a greater chance of long-term sustainability and meaningful use.

What are your hopes for the future of urban sports infrastructure?

I believe movement is the key to health and quality of life. Trenčín, as a progressive and culturally active city, has the potential to create high-quality, community-oriented, and multifunctional spaces that serve all generations. It's important to invest not only in infrastructure but also in education and awareness – on how these spaces are used, how to share them, and how they can support inclusion rather than conflict. If done right, sports facilities can be more than just spaces for exercise – they can be places for connection, learning, and community growth.

Pic. 51.: Born to Trick Park. Source: Erik Stopka.

Born to Trick Park

Country: Slovakia

Keywords: accessible sport facilities, community driven, parkour, fundraising

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Pic. 52.: Drone shot of the Born to Trick park. Source: Born to Trick.

Pic. 53.: Volunteer leaders cycling with kids to their regular sports training. Source: Matti Hirvonen.

Cycling to Trainings: How Finnish Kids Turn the Commute into Team Spirit

The Cycling to Practice initiative in Finland encourages children to bike together to sports training, turning daily commutes into fun, social, and physically active experiences. Launched by a parent involved in cycling advocacy, the project expanded from one football team into a widely adopted practice supported by clubs and families. It is organized simply through team chats and volunteer leaders, making it easy to sustain and replicate. The initiative fosters independence, physical activity, and team spirit, while also easing daily logistics for parents. Strong local infrastructure and active community involvement have been key to its long-term success.

Matti has worked as an Executive Director in the Network of Finnish Cycling Municipalities since 2008. His main task is to offer the best possible tools to cycling promoters all over Finland in different cities, municipalities, companies and NGOs. He is involved in various types of cycling promotion programs, infrastructure development projects, campaigns and marketing. Infrastructure and maintenance is important to get more people cycling in winter, but attitudes are just as important. And attitudes can change. Photo by fiksustikouluun.fi.

Interview with Matti Hirvonen:

What is the story behind the whole initiative? How did it start, and why?

The idea came from my long-standing work – I've been active in the Finnish Cycling Municipalities network for about 15 years now. Promoting cycling and reducing car dependency has always been central to our work. Around 2010, we started experimenting with cycling and walking school buses. Later, we extended the idea to hobbies. A few years ago, when my own children joined our local football club, I realized there was no systematic way for kids to get to training by bike. Some walked or cycled, but it wasn't organized. So, we started with one age group, and then it grew. It turned out to be a very natural and practical solution for families.

How was the idea developed and refined over time?

At first, it was just about testing it with one group. When we saw that it worked and that both kids and parents responded positively, we integrated it into the club's strategy and guides. That way, it could live beyond any single person's involvement. We also kept things simple – communication usually happens via a WhatsApp group, and the volunteers or coaches lead the rides.

How is the "Cycling to Practice" initiative organized within the club?

The process is very straightforward and driven by the teams themselves. At the start of each season, parents are informed through the team's WhatsApp group or during parent meetings. Each team appoints one or two adult leaders – usually coaches or parents – who take charge of planning the route, testing it in advance, and coordinating the rides.

Pic. 54.: Source: Matti Hirvonen.

The club encourages the practice, but it's up to each team to organize it according to their own needs and schedules. On training days, a reminder is sent in the chat, and children can join the ride at several pick-up points along the way – usually places like a nearby store or bus stop. No sign-up is required. Parents just send a quick message like "Elias will join at Alepa," and that's it.

What does a typical group cycling trip to practice look like?

A usual ride is about 4 to 7 kilometers and takes around 25 minutes. There are typically 15 to 20 kids aged 9 to 10, accompanied by two adults – one in the front, one in the back. Along the way, they stop at 3-4 locations where other kids can join in. The leaders arrive a few minutes early and guide the group safely to the training ground. Before the first few rides, children are reminded of the basics – riding in a line, using hand signals, and ringing the bell when needed. After a few sessions, the process becomes second nature. When the weather is difficult or the distance is longer, the ride is sometimes combined with public transport. The goal is always the same: to avoid car use and make the journey part of the fun and social experience of being in the team.

Why do you think the project is successful?

It's really about simplicity and usefulness. For parents, it means they don't have to drive their kids to training. For kids, it's fun – they often prefer riding together even if they could go on their own. The whole system fits smoothly into everyday life. That's what makes it work.

What were the biggest challenges or failures during the process?

One challenge was that in Finland, children are generally encouraged to be independent, so many parents didn't see the added value in organizing school cycling buses. In some cities, the idea didn't stick because it wasn't structurally integrated – it depended too much on individual enthusiasm. Without clear support or continuation plans, the projects faded. Infrastructure quality is also a key factor. Without safe routes, it becomes much harder to implement.

Who participates in the cycling initiative, and has it reached any unexpected groups?

The main participants are children aged between 4 or 5 and up to 16 or 17. Our club has over 500 members, with more than 400 children spread across 13 different teams. It's a fairly mixed group in terms of background, although most of the kids are boys. Interestingly, we've noticed that the cycling aspect appeals even to children who aren't particularly enthusiastic about football itself. The social and fun nature of cycling together is often what keeps them involved in the club. For some, the journey becomes just as meaningful as the training.

How was the local community involved in developing and running the cycling-to-practice initiative?

The whole thing is built on community involvement. Most coaches are parents who volunteer. We made sure to include the concept in all the club's materials, so that even

Pic. 55.: Cycling commute has social and fun added value for kids.. Source: Matti Hirvonen.

if volunteers change, the system stays. Parents also help by making sure kids' bikes are in good shape.

What kind of feedback have you received, and how has the initiative affected the club community?

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive – parents appreciate the practicality, and kids are genuinely excited about the group rides. Occasionally someone asks about safety, but there have been no serious incidents so far. In fact, football itself tends to involve more risk than the cycling trips. Beyond the logistics, the initiative brings kids and parents together outside of training sessions, strengthens team spirit, and creates more opportunities for informal interaction. For some children, the social experience of cycling as a group is what keeps them engaged in the club – even more than the sport itself.

What kind of impact has the initiative had on participants, both in terms of everyday benefits and longer-term effects?

The initiative brings a wide range of benefits. It simplifies everyday logistics for families, increases children's physical activity, and makes the whole sports experience more fun and socially connected. Cycling to and from training essentially doubles the amount of exercise kids get, and adds a different, more relaxed kind of movement into their day. The combination of physical movement, independence, and social interaction creates lasting value that goes far beyond just getting to practice.

The initiative was also recognized by the Finnish Olympic Committee, which awarded us for this effective idea.

Pic. 56.: Source: Matti Hirvonen.

Pic. 57.: With bikes on a metro station. For longer distances or during winter months, it's effective to combine cycling with public transport. Source: Matti Hirvonen.

How does the local infrastructure support active mobility, and what role does it play in making the initiative accessible?

We're fortunate that the infrastructure in our area is quite strong. Cycling routes are well-maintained, intersections are designed with safety in mind, and there's sufficient bike parking near training fields. For longer distances or during winter months, we often combine cycling with public transport or walking – anything to avoid relying on private cars. That flexibility is key to keeping the initiative going year-round.

More broadly, Helsinki is in a good position when it comes to active mobility. Cycling accounts for about 11% of all travel, with walking and public transport making up even more. The city invests around 20% of its transport budget into walking and cycling, and that commitment really makes a difference in enabling initiatives like ours to succeed.

What advice would you give to others planning a similar activity?

Keep it practical and keep it fun. Don't overcomplicate things with big environmental messages – focus on how it makes life easier and more enjoyable. And integrate it into your club's structure from the start.

What would you do differently if you were starting over?

I'd start small, in places where the infrastructure already supports it. Early on, we tried to spread the idea more broadly through the Finnish Cycling Municipalities network, but it didn't take off everywhere – mainly because it lacked

structural support and readiness in some areas. Building strong local examples first would have made it easier to inspire others and show what's possible in practice.

In your opinion, what are the biggest barriers to promoting an active lifestyle?

We're still stuck in car-centric systems, both in infrastructure and mindset. Changing that takes money and time. It's not easy, but the shift has already begun – we just have to keep pushing.

What changes or policies would help improve access to sports facilities?

There needs to be real cooperation between different sectors – transport and sports planning can't be siloed. Helsinki has done well with this by aligning mobility and leisure strategies. Also, meaningful investment is key.

What are your hopes for the future of urban sports infrastructure?

I hope that sports facilities will be located close to where people actually live and that they'll be easy to reach without needing a car. Proximity and accessibility are key – without them, it's hard to support active mobility in everyday life. That kind of planning makes a real difference, especially for children and families.

Pic. 58.: Kids on bikes arriving to their sports training. Source: Matti Hirvonen.

Cycling to Trainings: How Finnish Kids Turn the Commute into Team Spirit

Country: Finland

Keywords: active mobility, community involvement, independence and fun, cycling to practice, infrastructure support, everyday logistics with kids

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Pic. 59.: Source: Matti Hirvonen.

Conclusion and recommendations

If one thing is clear from the stories in this publication, it's this: no one is coming to save us. Most of what exists today – be it a pump track in Bratislava, a parkour spot in Trenčín, or a bike-friendly schoolyard in Trnava – was imagined, designed, pushed forward, and sometimes even built by people who simply couldn't wait any longer. Communities had to act, fundraise, and advocate on their own. Parents became planners. Neighbors became builders. Children became testers.

And yet, we believe the tide is turning. Cities like Trnava are showing what's possible when municipalities step in not as gatekeepers, but as partners. When proximity, play, and participation become policy – not just passion projects. When the everyday lives of children become a legitimate subject of urban planning – not an afterthought.

Because the real goal is not more sports fields, but more freedom. Not just movement, but natural, spontaneous, joyful movement. Children are born to move. They don't need structured programs or permission slips to run, jump, climb, and explore. What they need is space. What they need is trust. And most of all – what they need is for adults to stop getting in the way.

Our cities have become places where play is restricted, movement is supervised, and every outing requires a car ride. But the stories in this report prove that a different city is possible. A city where children can move safely and freely, where a short walk leads to excitement, and where being active is not an "activity," but simply a way of life.

Not every municipality is there yet. Many of these spaces still exist despite the system, not because of it. Too often, volunteers fill the gaps left by public institutions. Parents are handling the permitting process. Neighbors raise the funds. And yes, it's exhausting. But it also works – and it builds something deeper than infrastructure: it builds community.

Pic. 60.: One of the events at the Born to Trick park. Organized by the community for the community. Source: Erik Stopka.