

Barcelona Walk21 2008

Conclusions

The 9th International Walking Conference – *Walk 21 Barcelona – a Moving City*, was held in Barcelona from October 8th-10th 2008. It was organised by the Association of Catalunya Walks (Association Catalunya Camina) and the Municipality of Barcelona, in cooperation with the Generalitat of Catalunya, the Disputacion of Barcelona, the Consorci of Zona Franca, and the sponsorship of ATM, TMB, FGC, and the Tramway Service.

The conference concluded that behind many of the most walkable places in the world there is a shared vision between local people, politicians and technical experts which informally influences the way a community is planned, managed and enjoyed. The International Charter for Walking is being used around the world, with increasing success, to define the commonality of such visions – which have often not been written down; to instigate new partnerships and to anchor local priorities. More communities are encouraged to use the Charter in a similar way and report developments to Walk21 so that they can be shared and inspire others.

Successful relationships which deliver walkable places are manifested in accessible watersides and parks, inspiring art and entertainment, integrated public transport systems and supportive services and facilities. Within organisations we find planning hierarchies which prioritise the needs of young people, the elderly and the less able and transport policies which focus on ‘mobility’ rather than traffic. Barcelona, for example, has a Mobility Directorate, evolved from a previous transport department, which works closely with Catalunya Walks and aims to keep the city moving as part of a political commitment to ‘serve citizens, make them comfortable and encourage them to know each other’. More communities are encouraged to evolve people centred policies and invest in practical projects which deliver visible improvements to the quality and ease of every day journeys on foot.

Quantifying the benefits of visionary policies to deliver more walking is becoming increasingly affordable and reliable. New technologies allow walkers to be counted and tracked and the quality of their experience interrogated and valued. These tools need to be discussed in more detail at future conferences and correlated to existing air quality, vehicle speed, road safety and sedentary lifestyle data to build a stronger understanding of the real benefits and returns that good policies and budgets for walking can deliver.

Internationally the World Health Organisation has recognised a lack of physical activity as the greatest risk for the elderly and is committed to a cost benefit study for improving the evidence base for justifying medical investment to encourage more every day walking. Walking should be at the base of physical activity pyramids, underpinning national preventative care policies and connected to transport strategies so that investment on the ground is responsive to the every day needs of those who particularly need to be more active.

It is hoped that the cities of Barcelona, London, Copenhagen and New York - brought together for the first time at the 9th Walk21 conference - will work together to benchmark the impact of local walking policies against five common criteria of walking excellence during 2009. The criteria are likely to include activity levels, flow counts, perception studies, environmental quality assessments and policy evaluations. The evidence will be collated and presented at the 10th Walk21 conference

in New York in 2009 in advance of other communities joining the benchmark project in 2010. Other communities are invited to contribute to the discussion which will soon set the methodology for measuring, recording and presenting the common indicators of walkable communities on the Walk21 website.

There is a growing number of community organisations, politicians and professionals engaged in projects to support more walking and they benefit from sharing experiences at events such as Walk21 to develop best practice. Walk21 aims to evolve an online community for professionals to debate and exchange ideas over the next few months and it is noted that the International Federation of Pedestrian Associations is growing in parallel and committed to providing online templates to support new organisations to grow and collaborate with each other. Individuals are encouraged to join these networks and keep in touch between conferences.

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