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HSY

How to promote e-bikes

Campaign concept based on experiences from BSR-electric project 2017-2020

Helsinki Region Environmental Services (HSY)

BSR ELECTRIC

interreg Baltic Sea Region

EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND

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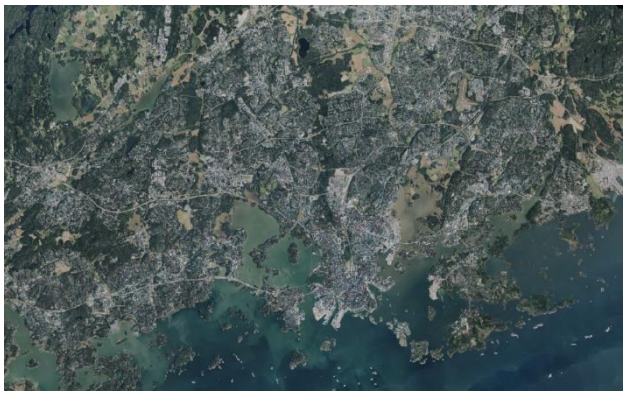


Helsinki metropolitan region Photo: HSY

1 Background

Helsinki Region Environmental Service (HSY) took part in the BSR electric project from December 2017 to the end of September 2020. The project was funded by INTERREG Baltic Sea Region Programme 2014-2020. As a result of the project, HSY's BSR-electric team has developed a concept of a campaign increasing e-biking (in the northern climate) which is planned, tested and validated and that has sufficient potential to be implemented in any other region too. Most parts of the campaign are scalable for any region in the EU, winter biking ideas being especially for those regions with cold climate, like many Baltic sea area BSR project countries. The concept is primarily made for the public sector, but it can easily be modified to be used by NGOs and in most parts, also for private businesses.

2 Identifying target groups

Identifying the right target groups is very important when planning a promotion campaign. The campaign will be more effective if it is clearly focused on a certain specific group that is large enough so that the changes made in mobility will make a difference. The target group usually consists of smaller subgroups, people who have different motivations to change their behavior. People can be motivated by factors that improve their health, things that help them save money or things that are "cool". One aim of this user case was to find a group of people who own two cars, or more, and recognize their motivation to change from car use to e-bike.

HSY's BSR-electric campaign was targeted especially at the families in Helsinki metropolitan region who own two or more cars. In Finland, around 500 000 families own two cars. A large amount of these families live in the Helsinki metropolitan region. Even though it is the capital metropolitan region, distances are quite long - travel to work can be 20-30 kilometers for many people. Also, the majority of the second cars are more than 10 years old.

Based on our experience, it is important, however, to be ready to rethink the target group. It is possible to find out in the middle of the process that another target group would be more effective.

One very interesting finding – although not very deeply or statistically examined - of the BSR-electric project was that most of the cars that families have replaced with e-bikes in the last year haven't been the second cars of the families but their only cars. The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report in October 2018 and the public debate about it has been a final trigger for many families to sell their car and buy e-bikes instead. These families replacing their cars are living mostly in apartments in the outer part of the inner city or nearest suburbs; not in housing estate areas.

More "cool" e-bike Photo: Egomovement (CC BY-SA 4.0)

A bit surprisingly, for many families it seems to be easier to sell their only car than the family's second car. In the case of selling the family's only car it is the mutual decision of the whole family. In selling the second car the decision affects the dynamics of the whole family - at least the mobility opportunities. The "first car" of the family is often considered as the car of the husband, and it is quite often a company leased car. The "second car" is considered as the car of the wife. If the "second car" is sold, the wife loses some of her freedom of mobility and becomes more dependent of the husband and his car. One obvious reason for people living in the outer part of the inner city or nearest suburbs to give up their car is also because these areas are built in the mid-20th century or before, and therefore the parking in these areas is quite limited.

3 Identifying and contacting stakeholders

In order to make the campaign more successful, it is very important to recognize and contact the right stakeholders. Depending of the nature of the campaign concept, stakeholders can include for example city officers (traffic-, environment-, and sport departments); politicians, cycling advocate societies, residents' associations, e-bike companies, companies that produce bike parking solutions, and urban planning consultancy companies. All of these parties were also the stakeholders of the HSY's BSR-electric campaign.

Stakeholder meeting at HSY 19.6.2018 Photo: HSY

For a public sector actor or NGO, it is very important to contact all the companies doing e-biking related business in the certain geographical area in the beginning of the campaign. Normally many companies are interested in the campaign in the starting stage, and they participate actively to the first meetings to see if they have some business opportunities within the campaign. It is also natural that as the campaign moves on, some companies stay active while others drop out. This was also experienced in HSY's BSR-electric campaign.

4 Developing campaign materials

A campaign can be built on different elements such as happenings, testing events, trial periods for people or certain organizations, social media campaigns, web pages and video productions. It is important that all these elements have the same recognizable graphical look. At least some sort of unity with colors and fonts should be planned, if the budget won't allow a more detailed design.

"Take part in the human experiment" Photo: HSY

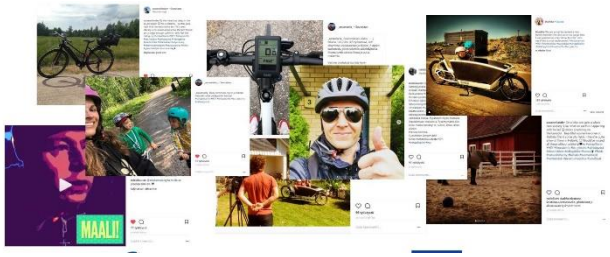
If the budget has some flexibility, using a professional advertising agency is a good option. Advertising agencies are professionals in planning campaigns, and they can have fresh and bold ideas for promoting cycling. For example, in the HSY's BSR-electric campaign the idea for the promotion campaign came from an advertising agency and with that idea the campaign was able to attract several hundred people for e-bike testing trials. The key element was the provocative slogan for the campaign: "Take part in a human experiment". The advertising agency also came up with the name for

the campaign “Virtaa fillariin”, which has a double meaning in Finnish: “Electric current to the bike” or “Power for biking”. The advertising agency also produced lots of graphic elements which were used in the social media, the web page of the campaign and videos. One very important element was the campaign picture with a young girl looking like a scientist: it evoked a wide variety of interpretations in viewers.

During the HSY’s BSR-electric campaign we learned that it is possible that the campaign will attract more people than expected, and that should be taken into account when developing materials. For example, the online forms for registration should be planned the way that they allow easy data analyzing of hundreds of participants in case the campaign attracts more people than expected.

5 Testing campaigns for families

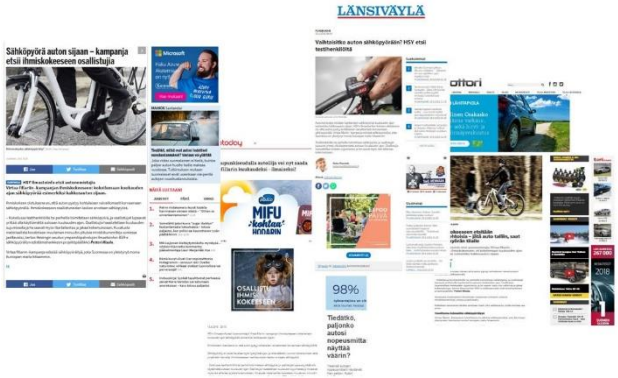
The first HSY’s BSR-electric testing campaign was executed in the spring and summer of 2018 and it was targeted for families in the Helsinki metropolitan region who own two or more cars. The application period was 18.4-13.5 2018 and the results were great: the campaign received over 900 registrations and a lot of media attention.



Instagram posts of experimenters’ 2018 Photo: HSY

In June four families were selected, and they made social media content about their e-bike experiment. One factor of the selection of families was their social media presence. That ended up being a very good criterion. The main channel for the content was Instagram, and HSY’s BSR-electric team also shared the content on HSY’s other social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter. The project made also four short films of the testing month of each family.

After the campaign period was over, the HSY’s BSR-electric team analyzed the success of the first campaign, and the conclusion was that the main factor for the media visibility was the social media presence. Many people saw and shared posts in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Many influencers also shared posts, such as the Deputy Mayor for the Urban Environment of Helsinki, who has a very large group of followers. It is unclear if the press release that was published in the beginning of the application period was the trigger for the articles about the experiment in newspapers and on the web, or if journalists noticed the testing campaign originally in the social media posts.



Some articles about the testing campaign in 2018 Photo: HSY

The success of the first testing campaign taught the HSY’s to be well prepared when creating materials: in the case of the online registration forms, they should be planned the way that they allows easy analyzing of hundreds of participants in case the campaign attracts more people than expected.

One emphasis of the HSY’s BSR-electric campaign was that the e-bike might be one solution for biking in the challenging Nordic weather. At the moment, only 1/10 of cyclists continues biking during the winter in the Helsinki metropolitan region. The project team promoted winter e-biking

in 2018 and 2019 by producing social media content, for example films and photos related to the topic.

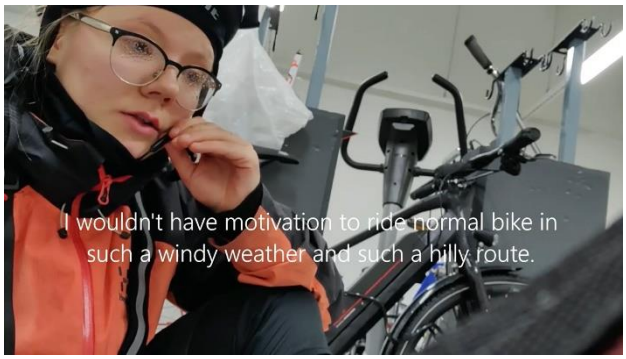
During the winter of 2020, the project team planned and organized another testing campaign where families substitute their car with an e-bike for a month. By organizing the campaign, the team wanted to show that e-bikes work well also during the winter.

The winter e-biking testing campaign got 329 registrations in less than two weeks (21.1.-2.2.). The team chose three volunteers for the experiment and all of them produced great material for the HSY's social media channels. The team also made three videos of the experiments by using a professional video producer.

A still picture from the winter 2020 video document **Photo: HSY**

Unfortunately, in 2020 Helsinki didn't have "real winter weather": in a historical comparison, the average temperature at February for all of Finland was the highest ever. Instead of being cold, the weather was very windy and stormy. Testing showed, however, the potential for e-biking also in these kinds of weather circumstances, because biking with a normal bike is very hard.

In this winter 2020 experiment, HSY's BSR-electric team asked people who took part in the experiment to produce videos about their experiences. These were quite popular in social media and this was a cost-effective way to produce materials compared to the videos made by professionals. Some extra work was caused by the fact that the videos had to be subtitled in accordance with the new Accessibility Directive.



A still picture from a video made by a participant **Photo: HSY**

6 Testing campaigns for apartment houses

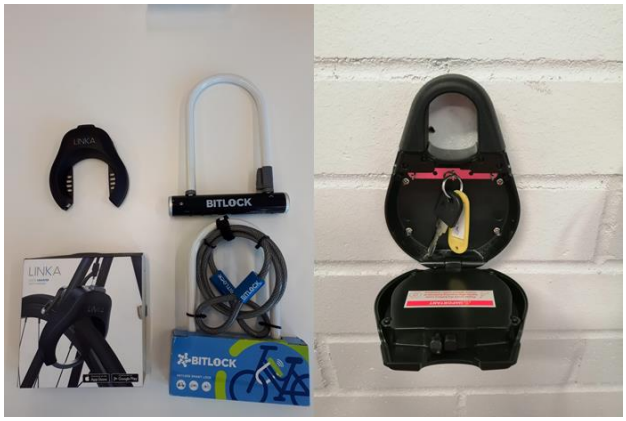
HSY's BSR-electric testing campaigns for apartment houses was a created while analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of global mobility megatrends. HSY's team had an idea to transform these megatrends into smaller experiments and pilots with considerable upscaling potential. The team identified three megatrends of mobility that could be leveraged in the new campaign: electric vehicles (obviously), shared use and smart solutions.

The testing campaign for housing companies was organized in the spring and summer of 2019. The application period was 20.2.-31.3 2019. The campaign got 75 registrations. Two housing companies were selected for the experiment. An e-cargo bike was provided for two-and-a-half months for the housing companies and a suitable storage room was set up for the bike. In addition, the Finnish Ministry of the Environment decided to finance an experiment in two rental house companies as a part of their "How to halve your carbon footprint" experiment.

A still picture from a housing company video Photo: HSY

With this shared use testing, HSY's BSR-electric team paid special attention to the analysis of the routes, the "urban structure" of the area and the accessibility of services. These factors are very important in mobility experiments because they are the key elements affecting residents' daily mobility. Experiments with housing associations take a long time as residents need time to realize the potential of the new way of handling their daily mobility

The testing campaign for apartment houses also highlighted the challenges of digitalization, and in particular the shortcomings of relatively young and small start-up businesses. In HSY's testing campaign for apartment houses, smart lock solutions were tested for enabling shared use. Although the locks had been tested on several people in advance for a couple of weeks, the functionality of smart locks showed shortcomings at the beginning of the experiment. The second type of lock reserved for the experiment disappeared completely from the Google Play store during the experiment. The solution was to use a normal bike lock and store the key in a key box that was managed by a mobile application. The key box is intended for peer-to-peer apartment rental, where the market is currently significantly larger than bike sharing and that is why the products are more reliable. The key lesson was that in the case of a critical solution for the campaign - such as a safe and easy-to-use implementation of shared bike locking in our experiment - alternative solutions need to be considered and possibly completed. In a digitalizing economy, some products are offered to consumers as unfinished, and there are greater risks associated with crowdfunded start-up products in particular.



Smart locks used in shared use of e-cargo bikes Photo: HSY

The testing campaigns for apartment houses highlighted the complexity and time required to implement the instructions and advice for a shared-cargo bikes. The instructions were important despite the fact that there were test driving events and demonstrations in the houses, because not all potential users will be able to attend the events and, on the other hand, those who attended the events will not be able to absorb all the things they were taught.

Electric-assisted cargo bikes are mainly sold to active cyclists who are well-versed in expensive bikes when buying, and who delve into the technical elements and use of the bike. Ready-made instructions are rarely available for the more occasional user of a shared bike, so they must be produced by the campaign organizer. The challenge in drafting the guidelines was to make them sufficiently clear and concise, so that the length of the guidelines does not become a threshold for using the e-cargo bike.

Instructions for four apartment houses (Fi/En) Photo: HSY

The key lesson learned was that in the case of an e-cargo bike or any other a product or service aimed at an enlightened group in the consumer market, it is worthwhile for the campaign organizer to spend a lot of time in implementing guidance and advice for the more casual user. The campaign organizer should familiarize themselves with the e-cargo bike and charging system carefully before delivering it to users, thus avoiding time-consuming visits to the trial site. It is worth trying to test solutions to various problems in advance. In products where this is possible (e.g. locks, timers) it is a good idea that the experiment organizer reserves an extra unit for himself or herself so that it is easier to instruct users in a remote counseling situation.

7 Longer testing campaigns in a certain place

HSY's BSR-electric project team organized an e-bike testing campaign at the Korkeasaari zoo in Helsinki from 21.5-3.6 2018. The project offered families a chance to go by e-bike from the parking lot to the gate of the zoo and back. Parents tried e-biking and children traveled with an e-bike taxi. Around one hundred families participated in this campaign and the feedback of the participants was very positive.

E-bike testing in Korkeasaari zoo 2018 Photo: HSY

With this testing campaign HSY's BSR-electric team learned how important it was to organize a longer testing period in a suitable place. The Korkeasaari zzoo was a perfect place for the experiment. Although Korkeasaari actively promotes sustainable modes of transportation, most of the families come to the zoo by private car. The walk from the parking lot to the gate is around 400 meters. There are many different routes to choose from, so if one route was crowded, testers had a possibility to use another. This Korkeasaari testing was very successful and there was an idea to organize similar testing opportunity elsewhere in the region. The HSY's BSR-electric team decided, however, not to organize another longer testing campaign because it was very hard to find equally good places. Many sites were suggested and studied, but all had some disadvantages: too short a distance from parking lot to the destination, too crowded routes, etc.

Korkeasaari zoo - routes from parking lot to the gate Photo: GoogleMaps

8 Testing events

Studies show that one of the biggest reasons for the weak image and low usage of e-bikes in Finland is the lack of testing opportunities. Therefore, HSY's BSR-electric project team has chosen to enable as many e-bike testing opportunities as possible. Within the framework of the campaign, 15 e-bike testing events for residents and 13 e-bike testing events for workplaces were organized. Smaller scale events took place in the suburbs, whereas larger events were carried out in the Helsinki city center as part of, for example, Helsinki Day or the EU Presidency opening celebrations. Most of the events for workplaces were supported by the Helsinki Region Transport organization (HSL).

Testing event at Helsinki Day 12.6.2018 Photo: HSY

In addition, HSY organized three e-bike testing events and an e-bike tour for the members of parliament as well as an e-bike tour for journalists. Overall, 1,810 people tested e-bikes in all these project events.

E-bike tour for Finnish Parliament 2018 Photo: HSY

HSY's BSR-electric project team had planned lots of happenings for the spring and summer of 2020, but due to the coronavirus pandemic they were canceled. The project team had to develop new, virtual ways of producing happenings. HSY organized on Helsinki Day (12.6) and on Espoo Day (28.8) a live streamed e-bike ride along the shores of Helsinki and Espoo. Streaming was done on Facebook Live. The project team don't have data of the Helsinki Day stream, but on Espoo Day the first four-hour stream (four hours is the maximum length of Facebook Live) was watched 245 times and a second one-hour stream 137 times.

A live stream needed some effort. Especially some technical issues needed to be solved before the campaign organizers were able to produce a live stream from the bike trip. The main issue was image stabilization. HSY's BSR-electric project team used an electric assisted cargo bike for streaming, which is more stable than a normal bike. A mobile phone must also be stabilized by a gimbal (pivoted support system), and the gimbal must be attached firmly to the bike. Because live streaming consumes a lot of battery power, backup power sources must be used to secure charging during biking.

Streamed e-bike tour at Helsinki Day 12.6.2020 Photo: HSY

Facebook Live is an easy way to produce live streams. The downside is that it is quite hard to get viewers for the stream – viewers must be followers of the organization's account or be a guest at a Facebook happening. YouTube Live would be a

much more flexible platform: it is possible to share the stream to other social media platforms or embed the stream to web pages. To be able to stream YouTube Live from a mobile device, a channel must have at least 1,000 followers. If mobile streaming is important, the organization should put in the effort to get followers.

9 Conclusion

E-biking promotion is fun and very rewarding. Cycling has, in general, a very positive image. E-bikes are interesting, and they have lots of potential to attract new groups of people to cycling. The HSY's BSR-electric team has been lucky to see hundreds of people who are pleasantly surprised when they try the e-bike for the first time. Dozens of people have told HSY's BSR-electric team that after testing an e-cargo bike they have realized that the trips that they usually do by car are possible to do by bike.

E-cargo bike in shared use 2019 Photo: HSY

HSY's BSR-electric three-year e-bike promotion campaign has got a lot of media attention and gained positive feedback in social media and at different happenings. The sales of e-bikes doubled in Finland in 2018 and again in 2019. The same trend has been detected also in 2020 – despite, perhaps because of, the coronavirus pandemic. The motivation of the HSY's BSR-electric team for e-bike promotions has been very high, also because the team believes that its campaign has had some effect on the positive trend. The HSY's BSR-electric team believes that most of these motivational factors can be present in other countries too.

Project Manager Petteri Nisula and e-cargo bike 2018 Photo: HSY

We hope that this campaign concept will inspire all who want to develop more sustainable mobility. A quote from one of our experimenter videos expresses the essence of the work:

"The moment I hopped on this bike, I realized that there is no return."