

Workshop on sustainable and healthy urban transport and planning (16 – 18 November 2003, Nicosia, Cyprus)

Session:

Presentation title:

Children's Trails

Sandnes. Short profile

Sandnes is a Norwegian municipality of about 56.000 inhabitants, part of the region of Nord-Jæren, a continuous conurbation of about 200 000 inhabitants comprehending four different municipalities and running alongside a fiord. The capital of the region is Stavanger with 110.000 inhabitants.

Sandnes is centrally located in the region. The town centre lies at the bottom of the fjord with steep hillsides - a challenging topography for development. Forests and mountains close to the town are attractive for all kind of outdoor activities. A coastline of about 100 km is an excellent recreation area for all inhabitants of the region. The municipality is expanding very fast, with an annual population growth rate of nearly 2.0%.

Sandnes is a communication centre in the region. The main roads through Nord-Jæren, E39, Rv.44 and Rv.13, are all running through the town, and from it the roads split to different parts in the district. This is both an advantage and a challenge for the town.

Healthy Cities Movement and Sandnes

Sandnes joined the Healthy Cities Project in 1991, at first as an integrated part of the municipal administration, and later in 1994 as a separate Healthy City Office. Since 1998 and during phase III Sandnes Healthy City has again been an integrated part of the administration. To day the office has 3 fulltime employ, and there is board and a forum.

Many initiatives and projects aimed at improving health and environment protection have been carried on since 1991, both at regional and local level.

Children's Trails

Between 1998 and 2000 Sandnes was involved in making a Regional Land-use and Transportation Plan. One of the main postulates of the plan was that high density in urban settlements implies sustainable land-use planning and sustainable transport systems. Towns should therefore mainly develop within their current boundaries instead of expanding outwards into valuable rural areas and potential recreation areas. By concentrating new residential and job areas alongside high-capacity and high-frequency public transport arteries, mainly within current boundaries, the regional plan aimed at a reduction of car-transport and increasing of public and non-motorised transport.

The regional plan was endorsed by the Norwegian Government and contained very strong directives to be followed by the single municipalities in their spacial development plans.



Introducing substantially higher density in built-up areas demands special consideration and respect for existing local environment, preserving and improving quality of life. Therefore, following the rollover of the previous development plan, the municipality of Sandnes made a systematic effort to identify and strengthen the interests of children and young people in local authority planning work. Giving children and young people the opportunity to influence and participate in this work has been an important part of our planning process.

At the end of 1998 the municipality received an invitation from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to take part as one of 10 local authorities in a development program aimed at improving the environment in which children and young people grow up. As a result, the Children's Trails programme has had a total budget of NOK 525,000 (about 65,000 Euro), of which 450,000 was a grant from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs.

Children's Trails is a method involving registering children and young people's use of urban areas based on their own knowledge. These are informal green/play-areas and tracks or paths that are important for children and young people's games, motion and physical activities. Children point out the areas they use by drawing them on a map. The goal of the initiative was:

- To strengthen and make visible children and youth's interests in municipal planning.
- To give children and youth the possibility of participation and influence about using and shaping their own environment.
- To give a better decision platform for future land use.
- To follow national directives for taking care of children and youth's interests in planning.

Taking care of children's informal playing and moving areas gives children a better quality of life, a feeling of identification in the local neighbourhood and as a result, a feeling of wellbeing and health.

Children 8-13 years old, school teachers and nursery school nurses were involved in the project.

The project was a joint venture between Department of Culture, the Department of Parks and the Outdoor Environment and the Department of Education. The project was launched on an initiative by the Department of Culture, which also formulated the application to the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and chaired the steering committee. A project manager was responsible for registering Children's Trails. The Department of Parks and Outdoor Environment was responsible for the technical arrangements and provided the project manager with mapping tools as well as close contacts with relevant technical environments. The Department of Education had the main responsibility for contacting and motivating schools and nurseries to take part.

The method

- Children in all schools were asked to record on maps their own use of all kinds of areas
- As a supplement to map registration children gave qualitative information about areas and paths (what was positive with the areas? Why was it good being there? Was there something which could be done better?)
- All mapped information was transformed into digital form and is available through the municipal mapping program and intranet system.

The project started in October 1999 and was completed in January 2001. The registration process in the nurseries was carried out from January to March 2000. Registration in the

test schools took place at the same time and in the remaining schools from August to October 2000. Sixteen out of 18 primary schools, one junior secondary school and 34 out of 39 nurseries took part in the registration.

Results

The City Council endorsed the project's final report and decided that all physical planning should take it on account.

Consideration and evaluation of Children's Paths registrations is now introduced as a permanent routine in all physical planning processes.

The registration is a regular part of the "start package" handed out to estate developers at the start of their planning work.

Municipal and private planners proposing local development plans are strongly demanded to use the mapped information of the project in their planning, to take on account and possibly include in their plans informal children's paths and play areas.

The children and youth's representative* in the municipality has among other the task to ensure that the recorded children's trails and playing areas are taken on account.

The Municipal Development Plan contains separate targets and initiatives aimed at ensuring that areas which are defined as important for the physical activities and development of children in the Children's Paths project, are taken on account and possibly preserved through physical planning and development.

Marco Zanussi
Sandnes, 27.10.03

*) The Children and Youth's representative in political bodies was introduced in Sandnes' political life early in the nineties as a result of changes in the Building and Planning law, prescribing municipalities to appoint an officer with special responsibility to take care of Children and youth's interests in planning. Now the arrangement is well integrated in the municipality's political life, and children's representative has a full-time appointment meeting in the Urban Development Committee and giving pronouncements and comments about all local development plans where children's interests are involved.