



ENABLING CYCLING CITIES INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

INTERVIEW WITH MR. STEEN MØLLER

Mayor for Culture and Urban Planning, City of Odense





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ODENSE

Interview by **Oliver Hatch**, Urbrans.org

In your view, how important is political support and commitment for pro-cycling policies?

The political commitment to cycling is vital. In Odense there is a broad spectrum of political support for cycling in Odense and this has been the basis of the city success - all support cycling. Odense is part of the Danish cycling laboratory cooperation between cycling cities in Denmark. Yes, there is still a need for political champions for cycling, even if we all agree. You need someone to lead the way and to keep the focus. When people from Odense city go abroad, everyone cheers our cycling results - modal split, number of kilometres of bike path, but it's important not to rest on our success. Always set new goals and for this you still need champions to lead the way. We have an ambition to increase the percentage of children walking or cycling to school to 100% and for this investment is needed - and champions are important in this too

Have you a particular success story you can describe in respect of this?

Having cycling progress in Odense is not a one-person achievement. I respect the work of those Mayors that came before me - they laid the foundation for where we are now. Now we need to set new goals to make more progress.

Is a well-planned and steady flow of finance for cycling measures necessary?

We have tried hard not to see cycling as just cycling, but incorporate it with other policies and fund it in this way. A sustained funding programme for cycling is very important, in combination with funding for other policies. Funding for cycling can also be a tool to help achieve policy aims in other areas, for example children's health etc.

What is the position of cycle planning within your wider land-use and transport policies?

A new road in Odense will have a new bike path - automatically - as part of a written policy on this. The new pedestrian bridge being built over the railway will have a bike lane on it - without discussion. In this way cycling is incorporated into other things we do. In winter it costs a lot of money to keep the all the Odense cycle paths free of snow - but this is a priority. The citizens of Odense know that whatever the weather does, the paths will be free. This means that a very large number of people use the bike paths all year round. Cold and snow is no reason not to cycle. The city of Odense is serious when they say that the cyclists in Odense have the same possibilities as car drivers to use the roads even in winter.

Does your city have a cycling department or team and if so, how vital are they in promoting cycling?

In Odense there is a cycle team to promote cycling, but feel that all our policy officers have a very good understanding of cycling and incorporate cycling into nearly all their work. All policy officers in Odense are encouraged to think bike in all their work.

Do you consult with your cycle user groups and neighbourhood groups on cycling and how useful are their views and their role?

The city consults user-groups on construction and planning projects. For a new super-cycle-path, there has been a very active consultation process including an internet questionnaire, dialogue on facebook, several vox-pops and meetings. In this way the organised cyclists as well as neighbourhood groups and other citizens are encouraged to respond and get involved. The city tries to combine the wishes of the cycle users who like the fast super-cycle-path, with those who want more attention on children, families and elderly people. Not everyone wants the same things, but the city listens to their different views so that we can try to make it the right way.

How necessary for cycling is it that different city departments cooperate and work together?

Cooperation between city departments in Odense is vital and good, but it can always get better. The better we are at cooperating - the more we will achieve. There is no doubt about that. As a good example of cooperation In Odense we have 'cycle happy-school'. For school kids this makes the cycle more than a just a means of transport and it becomes a part of the teaching process. In this way kids become more familiar with bikes and are safer on their bikes - learning through play. The interesting part is that this is not a cycling project but a health project which uses the cycle as a means to other goals as well as being an end in itself. Odense tries to use the bike in a lot of ways.

Has your city been able to learn and adapt ideas from other cities for cycling - if so, how?

One of the most important things to do as a city is to look to other cities to see what you can learn from them. Whatever level you are on, you can always adapt ideas from others. Of course you can't transfer everything, but can definitely learn from others and we take ideas and inspiration back to Odense. Always keep your eyes open - you can still learn from others.

How does your city balance the provision of 'hard' measures for cycling (infrastructure) with the provision of 'soft' measures such as maps and promotion measures?

It is important that cities keep a balance between hard and soft measures for cycling - you need both. Promoting cycling needs sustained investment. Cities should improve the infrastructure and also use soft measures as well - they are both important, even in a cycle-friendly place like Odense.

How necessary are the communications and marketing of cycling initiatives to all your city residents?

Good communication in Odense has not only helped to get people on their bikes, but also helped to keep them using their bikes. New cycle infrastructure can be used as a tool to communicate the city policies to the citizens, so helping more people use their bikes. Odense is working on a new mobility and traffic plan to get people from their cars onto public transport and bikes - communication will help to make this have a broader impact. Get the media interested in what you are doing for cycling in the city and let them tell the story - this has really worked well in Odense.

Why is cycling important to you and your city?

Like most Danish people who grew up with a bike, I see cycling as healthy, a nice way to get around, its helping the climate and lowering the number of cars in the city. So I can nearly only see the positive side of getting people to use their bike.

How did you become convinced that cycling has an important role in your city?

I was always convinced that cycling has an important role in Odense.

If you had one recommendation to make to another city starting to plan for bicycles, what would it be?

If your city is starting from a low level and want to change the way that people are behaving, my recommendation is that the Mayor should lead the way. The most important thing is to start with yourself as a personal example. If it works for you as the Mayor, it will work for the city.

The interviews were taken by Oliver Hatch,
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THIS INTERVIEW IS PART OF 'ENABLING CYCLING CITIES: INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS'

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