Mainly soft measures are considered as awareness raising campaigns and provision of information to increase levels of walking, cycling, car sharing and use of public transport. Often the expression “public relations for cycling” is used synonymously. They are distinguished from hard measures, which are provisions of infrastructure.

Soft Measures are considered to be an important instruments for a cost-efficient promotion of cycling. On the one hand they aim to change habits and perceptions to overcome barriers to cycling (awareness rising campaigns). On the other hand soft measures can be used to spread information, to educate and to teach experts and users (information campaigns).

Since many cities in Central Europe currently are facing the problem of bad, unsafe and insufficient cycling infrastructure, improving the cycling network might be more important for starter cities. Implementing soft measures will foster the use of bicycles, which can lead to increasing safety problems wherever the infrastructure is in bad conditions.

This fact sheet aims to help in professionalising public relation efforts. It therefore provides readers with information about who is active in public relations and some general success factors of public relations for cycling.
Key factors for success of public relation

A study analysing public relation campaigns in Germany showed key factors for successful campaigning for cycling (see figure 2):

Public relation strategy: All measures related to cycling should be incorporated into a strategy for public relations. This strategy is necessary as the basis of work for decision makers and administration and informing the public at the same time.

Continuous campaigning: Continuous presence in media is a precondition for being recognised by target groups. Single campaigns will not be enough to embed cycling in peoples’ minds and to induce a mobility behaviour change.

Separated budget for public relations: It is recommended to ensure sufficient financial support for public relations for the long term. Deciding on a separate budget can help improve financial basis over several years.

Involvement of marketing experts: Efficient public relations require expertise in marketing. Cycling experts in municipalities often do not have a lot of experience in that field. However, many cities inserted public relations departments, which should be involved in cycling campaigns to increase expertise.

Targeted campaigns: Identification of target groups is a precondition for successful campaigning. It helps to use existing money efficiently. Against the background of constant addressing of people through marketing campaigns, targeted campaigning is promising in order to increase recognisability of cycling campaigns. More details about target groups can be found on CMB fact sheet S-02 Targeting public relations.

Involvement of decision makers: Politicians depend on public attention. Therefore cycling campaigns should include events where politicians can present themselves. This might increase political support for cycling in general. Additionally the role of politicians as being a model for citizens should not be underestimated.

Local VIPs as forerunners and models: Well-known persons can be multipliers for cycling promotion. This can be local or national VIPs.

Early information on measures: Providing citizens with information on plans and measures in an early stage of the project is recommended. Involved the public might prolong projects, but it increases understanding of problems and can therefore lead to improved support for future measures.

Preparing common campaigns: Often municipalities face the problem of financing public relations. Preparing a campaign on a superior (e.g. regional or national) level and making it available for municipalities can increase efficiency by taking advantage of synergies. This provides cities with options to implement campaigns with less budget requirements.

Corporate design and label: It is recommended to develop a corporate design for all means connected to the local public relation campaigns. This can be accompanied with establishing a label for bicycle promotion. This increases visibility and recognisability of campaigns.

Figure 2: Factors influencing design and success of campaigns (based on Prenzel (2012), p.175pp)

Lessons learned: Soft measures, especially campaigns creating a positive image of cycling, are considered as an important and cost-efficient tool to promote cycling. This fact sheet collects key factors for success of campaigns. Among them are: developing a public relation strategy that fosters professional campaigns on particular target groups. Continuous campaigning requires reliable and sufficient financial resources. The involvement of many actors is promising to exploit synergies and to save costs.

For further resources, links and best practice examples visit the Sustainable Urban Transport Project website: http://www.sutp.org/

Central MeetBike is implemented through the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme co-financed by the ERDF.

Contact: Jan Schubert / Dr. Frank Lieseke (after September 2014)
Tel.: +49 351 463-390 44 / +49 351 465-366 68
Email: jan.schubert1@tu-dresden.de / frank.liesske@tu-dresden.de
Contributing authors: Prof. Dr.-Ing. Gerd-Axel Ahrens, Jan Schubert, Kevin Vincent

Photo: Jan Schubert

Sources / Further literature: