

Suwon neighborhood goes car-free for world's first month-long EcoMobility World Festival



EcoMobility World Festival 2013, organized by host city Suwon, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability and UN-Habitat, was the world's first month-long presentation of an innovative and forward thinking urban transportation culture. The Haenggung-dong neighborhood of Suwon, South Korea was temporarily converted into an “ecomobile neighborhood”, presenting a real-life vision of car-free urban living for the future. EcoMobility is travel through integrated, socially inclusive, and environmentally-friendly transport options, including and integrating walking, cycling, wheeling, and passenging.

In September 2013, over 4,300 neighborhood residents adopted an ecomobile lifestyle for an entire month. Instead of driving private automobiles, residents of all ages and from all walks of life made their daily commute to work or school, trips to the shops and to leisure activities using a combination of their feet, pedal power, and light electric vehicles. With the help of the city administration, the neighborhood was redesigned for people, instead of cars.



To pull off this unprecedented experience, extensive preparatory works were underway since 2011. A program of workshops, consultations and EcoMobility training was designed to involve residents in the planning of the month-long event. At the beginning of the consultation process, the Festival idea was met with a mixture of enthusiasm, curiosity, concern, and opposition from residents. 240 city officials went door-to-door to address concerns and explain the Festival plan. As a result, by the time the Festival began, over 1,000 residents had joined the Haenggung-dong Residents' Group, which played a crucial role in coordinating the public's participation in the Festival.



The Festival provided an opportunity for the underdeveloped Haenggung-dong neighborhood to undergo infrastructural improvements. Based on residents' needs identified in a 2012 survey, Suwon City committed to create livable streets in the

neighborhood. The sidewalks of the main streets were widened to three meters on each side, improving walkability while sewerage infrastructure was upgraded and overhead cabling was buried. EcoMobility-themed street furniture was installed in green pocket parks which appeared in the newly reclaimed public spaces.



At the EcoMobility World Festival, a variety of programs attracted more than 1 million visits to the renowned 'EcoMobility Neighborhood'. The streets, where more than 98% of the registered cars were removed, were filled with cultural activities and weekend markets, which added a festive mood to the area. Residents and visitors explored the car-free neighborhood with innovative ecomobile vehicles sourced from 10 different countries.

Suwon attracted widespread attention from international media outlets and experts as the world looked on to see how the experiment unfolded. The second edition of the ICLEI EcoMobility Congress series, held during the first week of the Festival, brought together 500 local and international actors from the sustainable mobility field to study and explore the neighborhood amidst a four day program of debate and exchange.



At the end of September when this pilot project came to its completion, Suwon City passed on the baton to the residents. Numerous appraisal sessions and round-table discussions between the city and the residents took place after the Festival to discuss the future mobility policy of the EcoMobility Neighborhood. At the final round-table discussion, the community outlined their priorities for the continuation of ecomobile neighborhood.

The Festival developed local and international awareness on the value and feasibility of the ecomobile city model. Thanks to the support of strong leadership and engaged community participation, the month-long experiment proved that any neighborhood can transform into an area where pedestrian and cyclist activity flourishes, in a bold departure from car-centric urban design.

Building on the changing mentalities of Suwon citizens towards EcoMobility, Suwon hopes the Festival will act as a catalyst for sweeping changes in the transportation system in the city.

For more information on EcoMobility World Festival, contact the ICLEI EcoMobility team at ecomobility.festival@iclei.org or visit www.ecomobilityfestival.org