

Verde pentru biciclete

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Abstract

The campaign “Verde pentru biciclete” (Engl. “Green for bicycles”) is the first official initiative from Timișoara that encourages adopting cycling as an ecological and economical alternative to urban transportation; this addresses the citizens of Timișoara and not only, regardless of age. “Verde pentru biciclete” is a pedalling movement supported by the Bega Foundation, in collaboration with the Gratzu Sportive Club, KissFM, Ziua de Vest, Agenda and agenda.ro. The debut of the campaign took place of October 25th 2008, with the first “Verde pentru biciclete” event - “The bicycles Counting”. All the events that followed were held to draw attention on the importance of cycling, together with obtaining of certain facilities, necessary for the cyclists’ safe movement in traffic. Moreover, a number of communication platforms have been created between the fans of cycling; thus, the website www.pedaleaza.ro has been created, through which those interested can inform themselves or communicate on the forum and discussions group verde_pentru_biciclete@yahoo.com or through the social network Facebook (facebook.com/verdepentrubiciclete). This paper presents the activities held within the campaign since its beginning until today, as well as our future plans.

Key words: “Verde pentru biciclete”, Timișoara

Rezumat

Campania “Verde pentru Biciclete” este prima inițiativă oficială din Timișoara care încurajează adoptarea mersului pe bicicletă ca și alternativă ecologică și economică la transportul urban; aceasta se adresează cetățenilor din Timișoara și nu numai, indiferent de vârstă. “Verde pentru Biciclete” este o mișcare pentru pedalare susținută de Fundatia Bega Timișoara, în colaborare cu Clubul Sportiv Gratzu, KissFM, Ziua de Vest, Agenda și agenda.ro. Debutul campaniei a avut loc în 25 octombrie 2008, cu prilejul primului eveniment marca “Verde pentru Biciclete” - “Numărătoarea Bicicletelor”. Toate evenimentele care au urmat au avut drept scop atragerea atenției asupra importanței mersului pe bicicletă, alături de obținerea anumitor facilități necesare deplasării bicicliștilor în condiții de siguranță. De asemenea, s-au creat mai multe platforme de comunicare între iubitorii mersului pe bicicleta; astfel, a fost creat site-ul www.pedaleaza.ro, prin care cei interesați se pot informa sau comunica pe forumul site-ului, la fel ca și pe grupul verde_pentru_biciclete@yahoo.com sau prin rețeaua de socializare facebook (facebook.com/verdepentrubiciclete). Acest articol prezintă activitatea desfășurată în cadrul acestei campanii de la înființare și până azi, precum și planurile noastre de viitor.

Cuvinte cheie: “Verde pentru biciclete”, Timișoara

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The campaign **“Verde pentru biciclete”** is the first official initiative in Timisoara that encourages bicycle riding (cycling) as an ecological alternative to finding one’s way through the city. Our campaign started in October 2008. Everything began with an idea, a dream to make cycling a visible phenomenon in the community of Timisoara. This dream belongs to the “Verde pentru biciclete” initiator, Mr. Emil Cristescu. In order for this idea to become a reality, one has to ask: Are there any cyclers left in Timișoara? So we thought of counting them in one way or another. Thus, the idea of introducing bicycle unofficial license plates (similar to car license plates) came into being. Through their existence and use, cyclists feel that they are part of a much bigger community, that they can be considered equal partners in traffic. It’s interesting to note that in the first months of the campaign, when a lot of cyclists were still not using their plates those that did use them started saying “hello” to each other, even if they have never met before. At present, we have freely distributed almost 10.000 bicycle numbers to those that support the campaign. The events on two wheels branded “Verde pentru biciclete” were held to draw attention on the importance and the benefits of cycling. We want cyclists to be treated as equal partners in traffic.

The second event was **“Safety measures in traffic”** (22nd November 2008). During this event informative elements regarding the main measures that one have to take into account and licence plates for bicycles and signalling elements were distributed.

The third event was held between 8th December 2008 and 25th January 2009 in the form of an online game called **“Memories on two wheels”**. This was followed by **“Safety in traffic for the young cyclists”** (12th February – 28th March 2009), a project that was based on some road safety lectures held by representatives of the Timisoara Road Police

Service to high-school pupils. It ended with a contest between schools that had a theoretical task and a practical task (an obstacle course).

The most important event of the campaign “Verde pentru biciclete” from 2009 was **“The Spring Counting”** held on the 25th April. Over 1300 cyclists took part in this event – citizens of Timisoara, public figures from the fields of sports and showbiz, journalists and political figures. “The Spring Counting” benefited from a national recognition.



Figure 1. “The Spring Counting” (on the 25th of April 2009)

The next trip took place on the 16th May 2009 when we make a **“Trip for fun to the Pădurea Verde (Green Forest)”**. With this occasion, newly marked routes were opened at the Pădurea Verde and we have given people a new way of spending their leisure time in fresh air.

The event **“The ROcycle – Children’s Day on the Bicycle”** (31st May 2009) followed, a competition between secondary school pupils with a theoretical and a practical task.

During the summer months, “Verde pentru biciclete” proposed to the ones that remained in Timisoara a weekend alternative: 5 bicycle trips through the Banat region. An average of 200 people took part in each trip and, relying on the bicycle licence plates, a prize draw was held. The prize was a city bicycle for each of the five trips.

In September, for one week, “Verde pentru biciclete” rewarded those that went by bicycle to work with a

“Cyclist Breakfast” (figure 2). The “Verde pentru biciclete” team changed locations daily to congested traffic areas in Timișoara and we offered 200 packages with breakfast and bicycle licence plates.



Figure 2. “Cyclist Breakfast” (September 2009)



Figure 3. “Revolution on two wheels” (on the 25th of October 2009)

Because during autumn we count... bicycles, on the 25th October 2009 we made a “Revolution on two wheels”. We emphasized the cyclists’ common efforts to gain rights of movement through the Manifesto of the Revolution on two wheels. We wanted to mark this event and transform it into an event of hope: the hope that the cyclists’ dreams will come true. For this, we chose a new colour, a colour that symbolizes hope and joy: magenta. The campaign “Verde pentru biciclete” means “free pedalling”. Our message remains the same: we want green for bicycles in Timisoara. “Verde pentru

biciclete” is not a colour. It is a call to action, it is a state of mind. Almost 100 cyclists took part in this event, people we were glad to have near us for a whole year.

In December, “Verde pentru biciclete” installed a Christmas tree in the Opera Square in Timișoara that was partially illuminated by current generated by pedalling (figure 4). It was the first action of this kind to be made in our country. Furthermore, we have drawn attention to the fact that Santa Claus can be a cyclist and we have offered, in collaboration with Velospeed Curier, the rental service Santa Clauses on bicycles. Moreover, we have helped make a donation to the Elderly House.

Figure 4. Christmas tree partially illuminated by current generated by pedalling (December 2009)



“Verde pentru biciclete” has created, even since January 2009, 10 designs of special T-shirts to support cycling. They can be ordered online and sent via a cyclist courier in Timisoara (figure 5). Some of the T-shirts feature well known figures: Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great), Che Guevara, Lenin, Arnold, Gollum, Don Quijote, Gigel, Shakespeare, an astronaut and one that features pedalling into the infinite.



Figure 5. T-shirt to support cycling

The year 2010 has been full of “Verde pentru biciclete” events. As we planned, we organized an activity in each month. In January we organized exhibitions in the main supermarkets of Timișoara, with photographs taken during our events since the beginning of the campaign. In February we were glad to start a campaign aimed at the organizations in the city, “Employers on two wheels” through which we encourage employees to take up cycling. Up to the present, over 800 bicycles were donated to employees of a company from Timișoara. In March we organized our first treasure hunt competition in our town: “Discover Timișoara on the bicycle”. Over 180 cyclists, respectively 60 teams, took part in the competition and “discovered” various representative objects for the city on the Bega. In April, we went out again on a Spring Pedalling, forming a long queue of approximately 1000 cyclists from Timișoara. With this occasion, a national company donated the first 250 bicycles of the “Employers on two wheels” campaign. In June, we organized a cross-country competition, together with the Gratzu Sports Club, in a unique place in Romania: The Arsenal Park Cup in Arsenal Park, the only touristic complex with a military theme in our country. The over 150 participants came from all the corners of the country, attracted by the novelty of the contest. In July-August, we invited the people of Timișoara to enjoy nature and to come with us in longer rides, of a few tens of kilometres, through the county. In September we organized a new contest at the Pădurea Verde. In October “Green for Bicycles” was two years old, so we celebrated by organizing yet another pedalling trip through the streets of Timișoara. We tried to draw attention towards Timișoara’s squares and towards the areas that should be reserved for pedestrians and bicycles.



Figure 6.
“Employers on two wheels” campaign

The year 2011 – projects and plans

During this year, “Verde pentru biciclete” has concentrated on two directions: the competitive and recreational side and the social side, respectively.

Related to the first perspective, we planned to organize competitions and trips for the people of Timișoara and not only. The first event of this type was “**Discover Timișoara**” – the second edition. As usual, we enjoyed a numerous presence, despite the unfavourable weather. The participants were wet and dirty from head to toe but they kept the smile on their faces. The hardest part was counting the points from the participants’ wet papers. The Arsenal Park Cup followed, organized in Orăștie, in the Arsenal Park touristic complex on 19th June 2011, where people of all ages and all areas of the country came to participate. The months May-August were dedicated to the Banat cycling tours branded “Verde pentru biciclete”. An average of 100 cyclists took part in these tours, eager to relax in a weekend trip through the surroundings of Timișoara and, why not?, escape into nature.

When it comes to the social side, we concentrated on campaigns aimed at changing the mentalities and attitudes towards cycling. We continued the campaign “Employers on two wheels” this year and we plan to do so in 2012 as well, hoping that many more companies will concentrate their efforts of social responsibility and will encourage their

employees to take up cycling. At the same time, we will develop the campaign of gathering signatures to make new bicycle lanes and to improve those that already exist. Moreover, we will initiate an awareness campaign towards the connection between health condition and cycling, underlining other benefits from adopting the bicycle for daily urban travel.

The impact in the community of Timișoara

The campaign “Verde pentru biciclete” is already almost 3 years old. In each year of campaign we try to make special events and transmit as strong a message as possible. We aim to approach as many aspects of cycling as possible: to use the bicycle on our daily commute through town, to work and to shopping or as a form of leisure and fun.

We are addressing the citizens of Timișoara and not only, regardless of age. We want to emphasize the multitude of ways in which a bicycle can be perceived: as an ecological and economical means of transportation through the city, for daily commutes to work, school, shopping, as a means of leisure and fun and as a way to exercise. Thus the various actions that we undertook came into being: from competitions for children and teenagers to contests for all age categories to campaigns for encouraging cycling in various companies (for example, the “Employers on two wheels” campaign) to actions of rewarding of those that go by bicycle to work (for example, “The Cyclist Breakfast”) to campaigns that draw awareness on the streets and in schools, regarding safety measures in traffic.

Generally, due to the fact that our actions are special, even one towards the other, we are glad of the support of many typologies of people, from all social categories, age groups, regardless of upbringing or with various types of bicycles.

People were delighted by the emergence of a new organization that protects their rights, that demands civilized pedalling conditions and that mediates the dialogue between citizens and the local authorities. Moreover, they feel that they truly are part of a community which is their own. Their bicycles have licence plates that unofficially attest their belonging to the community. Friendships appear. They help each other. They are impatiently waiting for the next events – this is the first question that they ask at the end of each meeting. Many times they ask for our advice, they make propositions and come up with ideas regarding what could be done for cyclists in Timișoara.

Furthermore, many people have confessed that they gained a lot of courage to go by bicycle through town due to us. This is because the attitude of the other road users has changed in some way towards cyclists. Thus, the number of cyclists in Timisoara is permanently rising!

From the start of the campaign, almost 10 bicycle lanes have been opened in Timisoara, a sign that the authorities have started responding to the cyclists’ demands.

The events organized by Green for Bicycle are listed below:

- “Bicycle Counting” (25th October 2008)
- “Safety measures in traffic” (22nd November 2008)
- “Memories on two wheels” (8th December 2008-25th January 2009)
- “Safety in traffic for the young cyclists” (12th February-28th March 2009)
- “The Spring Counting” (25th April 2009)
- “Trip for fun to the Pădurea Verde”- inauguration of the newly marked routes at the Padurea Verde (16th May 2009)
- “The ROcycle – Children’s Day on the Bicycle” (31st May 2009)
- “Green for Bicycles” Tours through the Banat (June – August 2009)

- The Fortress Cup (5th September 2009) – partnership with CS Gratzu
- “Cyclist Breakfast” (21st-25th September 2009)
- “Revolution of two wheels” (25th October 2009)
- “Santa and the Green Tree for Bicycles” (21st -27th December 2009)
- “Discover Timisoara” (31st March 2010)
- “Spring Pedalling” (24th April 2010)
- “The Arsenal Park Cup” (20th June 2010)
- “Green for Bicycles” Tours through the Banat (June – August 2010)
- The Fortress Cup (5th September 2010) – partnership with CS Gratzu
- “Autumn Counting” (24th October 2010)
- „The Green Tree for Bicycles” (11th-18th December 2010)
- We took part in the Bega Boulevard Festival (June 2009) and the PLAI Festival (September 2009 + 2010)
- “Discover Timișoara” (20th March 2011)
- “Spring Pedalling” (17th April 2011)
- The Arsenal Park Cup – second edition (19th June 2011)
- Demonstrations of bike jumping–June–July 2011.



Figure 9. Weekend Bike Ride through the Banat 2010



Figure 10. Spring Ride – 17th of April 2011

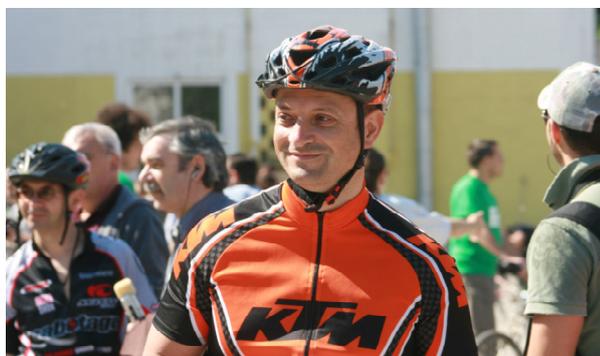


Figure 7. “Green for Bicycles” initiator, Mr. Emil Cristescu



Figure 11. Bike Jumps



Figure 8. The Fortress Cup – Pădurea Verde - 2010



Figure 12. Bikes for employees