



EcoMobility World Festivals

One Neighbourhood, One Month, No Cars

EcoMobility World Festivals are organised as month-long, playful urban reality labs to showcase the future of mobility, offer citizens the experience of alternative transport modes, and allow city planners to test new mobility solutions. **Konrad Otto-Zimmermann**, Creative Director of The Urban Idea and the man behind this concept, provides perspectives of the Festival in Suwon, South Korea in 2013 and Johannesburg, South Africa in 2015.

Cars occupy public space and impede social life in the streets. By reducing automobile dominance, cities can embark on a car-light journey towards greater liveability. How does a city begin to communicate this vision, introduce alternative modes of transport, and test-run solutions? To solve this problem, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, introduced the EcoMobility World Festival—a month-long, elaborate festival of road closures in a neighbourhood, with the motto “one neighbourhood, one month, no cars”. These playful “urban reality labs” allow people to experience an urban mobility future in real time and try out different clean transport options, while the city gets to experiment and evaluate its impacts.

The inaugural EcoMobility World Festival 2013 was held in Suwon, South Korea, and the second one in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2015. Both Suwon Mayor Yeom Tae-young and Johannesburg Mayor Parks Tau wanted to shape their cities into places free of cars, using a festival to raise awareness on urban transport issues and the need to change mobility choices. More importantly, both cities leveraged the festival to catalyse a series of urban transformations—in Suwon, it is the cautious renewal and revival of the Haenggung-dong neighbourhood in the old town centre; and in Johannesburg, the improvement of public transport infrastructure and services in and around the Sandton Central Business District.

Suwon 2013

Home to 4,300 residents and 1,500 cars, Haenggung-dong had been in decline and in need of urban renewal. For 20 months, city officials, civil society groups, residents and shop owners joined hands to prepare for the inaugural EcoMobility World Festival. Trained interviewers visited all households to explain the project, survey mobility patterns and transport needs, and seek opinions, while several public assemblies were held to further engage residents. The organising team even set up office in the neighbourhood centre and had their lunches at local restaurants daily to increase conversation opportunities with the community. Instead of a temporary redecoration of street space and reorganisation of traffic just for the festival, Mayor Yeom Tae-young sought to revive

Haenggung-dong with permanent upgrades to its two main streets.

Of course, not everyone was happy with the prospect of living without their cars for a full month. A very vocal group of opponents from the business sector put so much pressure on the city that a compromise had to be made—the four-lane Jongjo Street was closed for just 10 days instead of the entire month.

In the weeks following the festival, the city convened a roundtable where residents endorsed “ecomobility” as the new paradigm for Suwon’s future transport planning, lending support to the Mayor’s green urban development agenda, including the construction of a new tram line.



Suwon, South Korea, 2013

During the month of September 2013, the car-free streets of Haenggung-dong filled up with people strolling, cycling, riding small electric vehicles or enjoying a ride with a Velotaxi. Food stalls offered traditional Korean food, and restaurants placed tables and chairs in the streets. There were street concerts, dance performances and street theatre.



Johannesburg, South Africa, 2015

The new public space created from the road closure was activated with a colourful celebration of ecomobility.

Johannesburg 2015

Sandton Central Business District, with its banks and multi-national companies, hotels and malls, typically experienced an influx of 120,000 commuters and over 75,000 cars daily. “We want to show residents and visitors that a car-free city is possible and that public transport, walking and cycling can be accessible, safe, attractive and cool,” said Mayor Parks Tau when he announced the festival project.

The city closed West Street, the central axis through Sandton, and introduced Park and



Johannesburg, South Africa, 2015

Yesterday a busy, four-lane thoroughfare through the Sandton Central Business District, today the course of a water slide. The EcoMobility World Festival in Johannesburg gave citizens contrasting experiences of how public space can be used: streets for cars or for people?

Ride facilities, cycle lanes and new bus services. They ran a bold, multimedia campaign targeting 75,000 drivers to “Change the way you move”, offering alternative transport modes. Over 80 consultation meetings were held to engage citizens and stakeholders, and various partner events such as Freedom Ride and Discovery Duathlon took place as well.

The festival reduced the usage of private cars in Sandton by 22%, and saw five times more people walking along West Street. The introduced bus loop was well accepted,

and Gautrain, a light rail service, increased its ridership by 14%. The Park and Ride services resulted in 700 fewer cars entering the CBD every day. While these numbers suggest modest changes in travel behaviour, the festival fulfilled the Mayor’s goal to “create noise”—for the first time in South Africa, urban transport was subjected to a wide and intensive public debate. ●