

Application Form submitted by the initiatives to participate in the Transformative Cities People`s Choice Award

| GENERAL INFORMATION | |
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| Location: | Budapest, Hungary |
| Title of the Transformative Initiative: | Cargonomia Community Cargobike and Local Food Distribution Center |
| Name of organization: | Cargonomia |
| Type of organization: | Non-profit cooperative that serves as a sustainable urban transport center and local, organic food distribution point. |
| Website: | www.cargonomia.hu |
| Category and Edition: | FOOD. Transformative Cities Award 2 nd edition (2019). |
| STORYTELLING | |
| Summary | |
| <p>Cargonomia offers solutions for reducing the environmental impact of food production and distribution, and low carbon logistics by promoting and distributing local organic food products, increasing access to seasonal fruits and vegetables, and supporting proximate, low-waste, cargo bicycle- assisted distribution chains.</p> | |
| Context and problem definition | |
| <p>Cargonomia attempts to provide a locally appropriate solution to reducing the negative environmental and social impacts of industrialized food systems and long distance transport networks. Globally, securing access to healthy food that is produced in a manner that does not exploit nature or humans is an integral step in mitigating against climate change and increasing wellbeing. Food production, processing and distribution account for about one-quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions. While production is the most emissions-intensive stage of agriculture, the post-production stages also contribute significantly. Complex and distant food chains add to the alarming amount of food waste, which equates to roughly one-third of global annual food production.</p> | |

On the local scale, recently the operating conditions for civic initiatives have deteriorated in Hungary. Environmental and sustainability issues have never been sufficiently mainstreamed, and persistent restructuring within national governance has further limited their representation in public and educational policy. Civil society organizations continue to be marginal actors with limited influence and an unstable operating environment. Cargonomia aims to address these complex issues by maintaining a solidarity based community space for gathering, discussion and exchange.

Design and Initiation

Cargonomia serves as a sustainable urban transport center and local, healthy and organic food distribution point. The cooperation consists of a cargo-bike messenger service (Arany Kerek), a bicycle-building cooperative (Cyclonomia), a family-scale organic vegetable farm (Zsámboki Biokert), an organic bakery (Pipacs Pékség), and citizen volunteers. The project team members have worked officially under the umbrella organization Cargonomia, since its establishment in 2015. They have been collaborating to implement advocacy and educational outreach workshops focusing on urban sustainability, organic gardening education, bicycle mobility, and self-sufficient living.

Cargonomia is the crossover point between the activities of the partners involved in the project (sustainable food production, promotion of low carbon transport solutions, bicycle competency advocacy) and aims to serve as a hub in the city center which can combine the complementary skills of each partner and their existing networks to have greater benefit within the community. Based on the principles of sustainability and fair trade, a primary goal is to increase access to locally produced products by promoting direct trade from local producers to consumer communities who are seeking healthy and environmentally conscious food options. Through the cooperation food products will be distributed to customer-partners throughout the city using locally manufactured cargo bikes. The cooperative helps supply more than 3,000 food boxes per year. It also uses proximate, low-waste, bicycle-assisted distribution chains, with bicycle messengers covering nearly 18,000 km per year delivering goods within 27 km² of the city.

The partnership of all these actors is centered around a physical space that serves as the dispatching center for messengers, the food box pickup point and a hub for hosting do-it-yourself repair workshops for bicycles, clothing and electronics. In addition to the direct marketing of local food products, Cargonomia is also a logistics center for sustainable urban transport solutions where community members can borrow, locally manufactured cargo-bikes. In 2018 Cargonomia launched a community cargobike sharing network which now

included 11 bikes and trailers accessible in 4 locations in the city. The site also serves as an open space for community activities which focus on sustainable transitions, conviviality and Degrowth. It hosts DIY and self-sufficiency building workshops, discussions and also cultural events which seek to implement synergies between new and existing social and environmental outreach projects.

Implementation

The model was developed with a focus on linking and streamlining existing services and infrastructure, including communication networks and operating space. The partnership supports the traditional business activities of its members while also enabling outreach activities to a wider audience. Regular events and workshops take place at the Cargonomia headquarters, on farms and, for more complex technical instruction, in the bicycle cooperative's workshop. At the onset of the partnership, one unoccupied building in the Budapest city center became the headquarters of Cargonomia, providing a central community space for the collaboration.

Individually, the partners are responsible for offering competitively priced goods and services. The biggest obstacle related to their quest is to maintain financial viability while operating as small-scale, local, de-mechanized enterprises. While each member of the partnership derives benefits from being part of Cargonomia, of particular importance is the pooling of infrastructure and human resources that provides greater stability than could be achieved if working individually. While the network contributes to the financial viability of the individual members, the partnership was inspired, not only by potential economic benefit, but also with the intention to empower collective outreach activities that would have a positive impact on the range of goods and services offered.

The resilience of the partnership is reinforced through shared commitment to cooperative principles. To increase the effectiveness of the partnership, partners use horizontal decision making and communicate through an online platform as well as having contact in person on delivery days and during meetings. Setting goals and addressing challenges collectively helps ensure that resources are used in a flexible and equitable manner. However, the partnership continues to navigate challenges as it develops. These relate to:

- a) maintaining efficient communication during peak production and service seasons;
- b) increasing impact without outgrowing the original vision or threatening the core principles of collaboration; and
- c) maintaining a non-profit partnership while surrounded by ongoing financial pressures.

Beyond the direct “in the field” experience, we also prioritize critical reflection of our activities through our academic research, being able to assess the direct and indirect impacts of our projects on the community in which we live, volunteer and participate. We have shown aptitude in pooling our intellectual, physical and financial resources to design projects which have specific relevancy within our community, and to date, moving forward with project implementation with mostly our own resources.

Results achieved and Evaluation

While Cargonomia is representative of a functional local solution operating at a micro scale, the sustainability and social principles inherent within the partnership have the potential to be replicated city-wide for increased impact. In the last two years, besides our everyday usage of cargobikes for personal use and bike messenger services, in particular to deliver locally produced organic food, we have helped extend cargo bike access to approximately 200 of our neighbors. Collaboration with our organic farming partners helps increase access to locally produced organic food to hundreds of families in the city.

In 2018 we formally launched a community cargobike sharing network with our own resources. At the moment 11 cargobicycles, trailers, dog and child carries are available to borrow and hosted at 4 locations in the city. We have also launched an urban edible agroforestry project in cooperation with the Zuglo municipality in the city, where we have begun planting edible fruit trees, berries, aromatics and bee friendly flowers in a formerly abandoned illegal parking site in the district.

By lending our cargobikes to neighbors, music bands, NGOs and artists, we have helped personify a growing interest in alternatives to automobile logistics in the city. The extended impacts of this localized network are maximized within the community through regular activities offering participants open spaces for learning and exchange, thereby creating conditions for meaningful dialogue between neighbors, craftspeople and active volunteers.

Political Strategies

Through personal research, observation of and participation in autonomous, self-organized collectives in urban locations we have all come to the conclusion that grassroots citizen social and environmental movements play a significant role in contributing to creating meaningful change in cities. The challenges faced in Budapest in establishing meaningful dialogue between decision makers and civic initiatives is a main obstacle which needs to be overcome in order to accelerate the impacts of sustainable development agendas in the locations. The civic sector is responsible for many of the most meaningful steps which have been taken to help transform Budapest into a more liveable, socially and environmentally conscious city.

In 2017, civic organizations became the target of new legislation against actors who have received funding from foreign sources. This challenge takes place at the same time as Hungary faces a greater crisis of growing separation of wealth between the city and countryside, and exodus of youth seeking employment opportunities abroad and a growing crisis and chronic underfunding of healthcare and education.

To counter some of these issues, we strive to work together with institutions that aim to support individual and collective efforts of citizens to improve community organization, the reappropriation of community space in the city, dialogue between citizens and local decision makers, and the relocalization of production and distribution networks.

Our educational and outreach activities aim to bring attention to the potential of community organization in the city and the existing civic initiatives working in our community. Our individual outreach events focus on passing on knowledge of organic food production and bicycle mobility, and self-sufficiency in growing food and bicycle repair, while forwarding a dialogue of engaged citizenry, local resiliency and ingenuity, and increased social cohesion through supporting accessible and open community spaces for action and exchange. The intent to pass on knowledge to youth, while providing support to invaluable community centers in Budapest is in line with our mission and values. We believe that contributing to building civil society in Hungary is a politically oriented strategy based on building solidarity, understanding and resilience within the local community.

Related legislations

It is a goal of the organization to support the preservation of agricultural heritage which exists in the Hungarian countryside by providing support to traditional family scale producers. We remain in contact with a network of producers whose products we help distribute, while using our capacity to promote the importance of their work in the urban context through our own activities and media outlets. We regularly participate in research projects and open forums in which collaborations between civic actors and local decision makers is discussed. In our individual research projects, we advocate for increased transparency in urban policy and planning initiatives, and also in support incorporating public and civic dialogue into urban policy.

We aim to impact youth education by reinforcing the importance of hands on education in the fields of organic gardening and bicycle competency, and we promote its potential by organizing workshops which during which we volunteer as instructors. We provide support to the budding urban gardening and agroforestry movement in Budapest by hosting events in partner garden locations and through the establishment of our first agroforestry test site in 2018 in Budapest.

Lessons learned

Specific Lessons learned include:

- Conscious food networks are model examples of circular economy systems and represent an opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with food production.
- Innovative partnerships between urban social entrepreneurs and rural producers are essential to provide stability to conscious food networks.
- Using cargo-bikes to deliver goods (including local food) within cities can significantly reduce emissions and pollution while contributing to building strong, integrated communities.
- Delivering positive social impact or co-benefits should be acknowledged as a valuable metric to include when measuring the success of sustainable production and consumption models.

The main lesson learned from Cargonomia is that ecologically conscious, circular production models can be facilitated by cross-disciplinary partnerships guided by cooperative principles. The meshing of traditional farming methods and human-powered logistics helps to demonstrate that resource efficiency in production systems is not linked solely to advanced technology or growth-reliant economies of scale.

Furthermore, the assessment of Cargonomia activities illustrates why the positive social impacts or co-benefits associated with producing and marketing goods locally should be a prioritized as a metric within sustainability assessments and included in circular economy and sustainability assessment discourse.

This suggests that future research and policy should incorporate metrics related to the degree to which initiatives deliver co-benefits alongside climate change mitigation. In addition to the numerous indicators measuring the direct carbon benefits of low-tech, high-interaction chains such as Cargonomia, additional indicators could be developed and used to assess whether or not positive social co-benefits are being delivered.

EXTRA INFO

Supporting documents

<http://www.cargonomia.hu>

<http://www.facebook.com/cargonomia>

<http://www.kozteherbringa.hu>

<https://cooperativecity.org/2018/04/10/cycling-for-alternative-systems-the-cargonomia-experiment-in-budapest/>

<http://lakatlan.kek.org.hu/cargonomia/index.html>