

ThinkBike Workshop in Lisbon

A safe and active journey to school for children

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On April 18 and 19, 2023, I had the opportunity to travel on behalf of Mobycon to Lisbon for a ThinkBike Workshop co-hosted by [Lisboa E-Nova](#) (the Lisbon Energy and Environment Agency), [Freguesia do Lumiar Borough](#), and the [Municipality of Lisbon](#) and supported by the [Netherlands Embassy in Portugal](#). Together with Chris Bruntlett ([Dutch Cycling Embassy](#)) and Pieter Litjens (Director of [CROW](#)), we delivered a 1.5-day workshop to show international examples of active school zones and how to generate more active journeys to school among children.

Lisbon is a unique and historical city which can be experienced by bicycle. Even though Lisbon is also known as the city of seven hills, 73% of the city is flat. Over the last decade, Lisbon started its journey towards



Source: Embassy of the Netherlands in Portugal

becoming a green, inclusive, and cycling-friendly city. Lisbon showed great ambition, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, and took the opportunity to introduce infrastructural measures that put people first.

As a result of the Velo-city conference, the E-Nova and the Dutch Embassy in Lisbon were inspired to organize a ThinkBike workshop for the local city planners. In line with the BICI proposal of E-Nova, in which E-Nova aims to implement school streets all over Lisbon, we decided to adapt the ThinkBike workshop to focus on safe and active school zones.



Source: Dutch Cycling Embassy

Dutch schoolchildren are among the healthiest and happiest in the world. This is in no small part due to the active and independent lives they lead, and how this is built into their daily lives through the ability to cycle, walk, and move through their environments safely and easily. The way children and parents travel to school in the Netherlands is often visibly different to the same journeys in much of Lisbon, with over two-thirds of Dutch families travelling by cycling or walking. In the Netherlands, the physical environment immediately around schools, as well as the broader street network, have been carefully planned and designed to ensure active journeys are safe, attractive, and a natural alternative to travelling by car.

About the Workshop

The workshop started with a ride-along with one of Lisbon's local bike trains (a group cycle ride to school led by an adult chaperone) and a morning visit to an active school street, which was temporarily closed to motorized traffic outside a group of 4 schools (with 1800 students from ages 3 to 18 years old). Afterwards, we proceeded to the event location of the workshop and were introduced to representatives from Lisboa E-Nova, Lumiar Borough, Lisbon Municipality, and the Dutch Ambassador to Portugal, Margriet Leemhuis.

The focus of the workshop was to explain what steps Lisbon (and the other municipalities that were present) can take to implement a safe and active route to school for children in Lisbon. Alongside my Dutch colleagues, we presented best practice in a series of plenary sessions with examples from the Netherlands and abroad. More than 75% of Dutch children cycle to school, but this has not always been the case. While many people assume



that the Netherlands has always been a paradise for cyclists, this isn't true. Like elsewhere in the world, many Dutch cities also used to be flooded with cars, making city streets dangerous for children and other vulnerable road users. Changing course required a deliberate shift in thinking, politics, and policy.

“Yes, but cycling has always been in the Dutch culture.”

After WWII, car ownership exploded in the Netherlands. Dutch cities became full of cars and simultaneously the Netherlands saw a peak in traffic fatalities—many of which were children. This loss led to protests by different action groups, the most memorable of which was *Stop de Kindermoord* (“stop the child murder”). *Stop de Kindermoord* grew rapidly, and its members held bicycle demonstrations and organized special days during which streets were closed to allow children to play safely: “We put tables outside and held a huge dinner party in our street. And the funny thing was, the police were very helpful.”

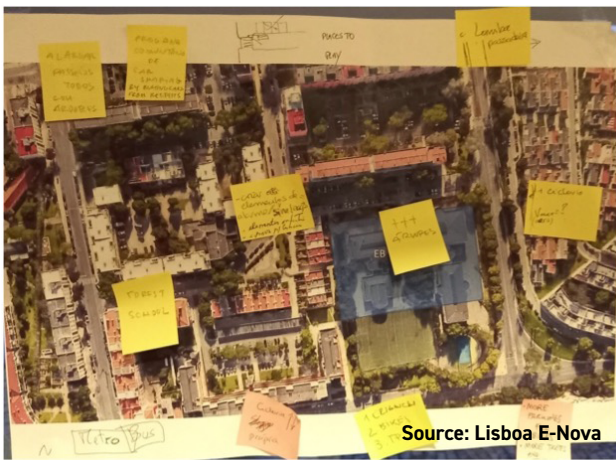


Stop de Kindermoord became subsidised by the Dutch government, established its headquarters in a former storefront, and went on to develop ideas for safer urban planning which eventually resulted in the *woonerf*: a new kind of people-friendly street with speed bumps and bends to force cars to drive very slowly.

A year later, in 1973, Car Free Sundays were introduced by the Dutch government because of the oil crisis, during which the price of oil quadrupled. This changed something in the Dutch mindset. Not only did they show once again what cities looked like without cars, they also proved that less oil-dependent forms of transportation, in particular cycling, could viable options for every day transportation.

Experiencing the street from a child's perspective

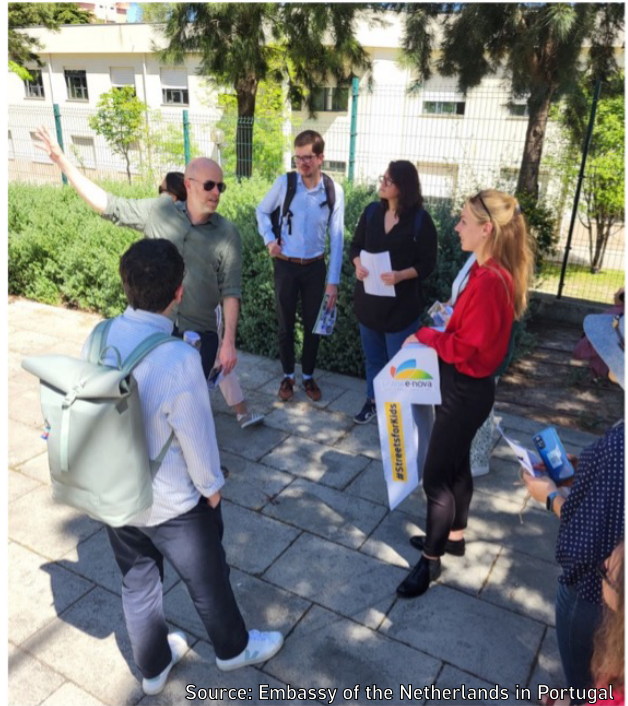
After a morning of presentations about practical examples of school zones from the Netherlands and abroad, we went out on the streets. We divided the participants into 3 groups, making sure that the groups were formed by different expertises and backgrounds (e.g. urban planners, architects, parents and cycling activists). Every group visited a school zone and identified elements that should be improved to create a safer environment for children that walk or bike to school. Additionally, we brought 'child periscopes' and 'child masques' to view the streets from a child perspective.



This was a great opportunity for the participants, representing departments from the cycling, road safety, public space, and cycling activists to discuss challenges as well as opportunities to use the historical knowledge they already have.

After touring the streets, the groups returned to work on the 'improved school zone' based on their experiences. Using a series of base maps and post-its, the groups were divided and challenged to use the international examples from the morning as inspiration to create a safe and active school zone. The purpose was to help them think

Child periscopes: Like any kind of infrastructure, kids experience streets differently than adults and have unique needs when it comes to safety and access. In 2018, the Global Designing Cities Initiative created a Streets for Kids Reverse Periscope, a simple cardboard-and-mirrors device that lets adults experience a street from a child's height. It's designed to help adults better understand the sightlines, hazards, and uncertainties as well as the unique and surprising aspects of navigating a world built for people twice as tall as you.



about simple improvements that can be implemented 'tomorrow'. The day concluded with each group presenting their solutions and answering questions.

Next Steps

On the second day, we visited the residence of the Dutch Ambassador to have lunch with the Deputy Major (Filipe Anacoreta Correia) and to talk about the workshop, car-free streets, and Dutch best-practices. In the evening, we held a screening of the movie 'Together We Cycle' and took part in a panel discussion. As it turned out, one of the groups had already been in contact with one of the case study schools from the film and presented their ideas to the municipality!

It was a great time with enthusiastic participants. Lisbon has many opportunities to become a cycling city, and I believe that when it manages to close more (school) streets to motorized traffic, it will make a huge impact on

the livability and quality of life. As icing on the cake, I was very happy to receive the following news the moment I returned home: "The Portuguese capital Lisbon will ban through-traffic in the heart of downtown." You can read the article [here](#).