



# International Velomarathon 2019

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**Project Title:** Organising a Bicycle Marathon

**Countries:** Germany and Ukraine

**Project Date:** April 1, 2019 to September 30, 2019

**Partner Institutions:** Jugendhilfe und Sozialarbeit e.V. (JuSeV) and Institute of Ukrainian Studies (IUS)



# International Velomarathon 2019

## Summary - English

The International Velomarathon 2019 was a tandem bicycle tour for young adults with and without visual impairments from Germany, Poland as well the Ukraine. The aim of the project was to set an example of successful inclusion in the field of international youth work. This goal was reached via bringing together participants with and without visual impairments from the three countries, letting them learn from each other and spreading information about our project among the general public.

*“I am amazed by our participants. Above all, I am impressed by their motivation and the will to persevere. Blind or not blind, it doesn’t really matter. And I notice that we complement each other wonderfully in our strengths” (Sibylle, group leader, Germany).*

From August 29, 2019, to September 19, 2019, 33 participants aged between 18 to 25 cycled together from Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, to Berlin, Germany. Within the three weeks on route, they met activists from the areas of politics and civil society. Further, they visited touristic, educational and cultural facilities in each country. They analysed the accessibility of these facilities via conducting accessibility checks. The project was a success and everyone gained significant knowledge during the six months of preparation and three weeks of management.

## Zusammenfassung – Deutsch

Der internationale Velomarathon 2019 war eine Tandem-Fahrrad-Tour für junge Erwachsene mit und ohne Sehbeeinträchtigungen aus Deutschland, Polen sowie der Ukraine. Die Fahrradtour setzte ein Beispiel in der internationalen inklusiven Jugendarbeit. Das Ziel wurde erreicht durch das Zusammenbringen von Teilnehmenden mit und ohne Sehbeeinträchtigungen aus den drei Ländern, gemeinsames Lernen und die Stärkung des Bewusstseins für Menschen mit Sehbeeinträchtigungen in der Gesellschaft.

*“Ich staune über unsere Teilnehmer. Vor allem beeindruckt mich die Motivation und der Durchhaltewillen. Blind oder nicht blind, das ist dabei gar nicht so wichtig. Und ich merke, dass wir uns in unseren Stärken wundervoll ergänzen” (Sibylle, Gruppenleiterin, Deutschland).*

Vom 29. August 2019 bis zum 19. September 2020, radelten 33 Teilnehmende im Alter von 18 Jahren bis 25 Jahren zusammen von Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, nach Berlin, Deutschland. In den drei Wochen auf der Straße, traf die Gruppe Akteure aus Politik und Gesellschaft. Außerdem wurden Einrichtungen aus den Bereichen Tourismus, Bildung sowie Kultur besucht und ihre Zugänglichkeit überprüft.

## How did it start?

Though I was born in Ukraine, I moved to Germany at the age of seven years. I grew up in Germany and learned how the conditions within a family, a social class and a country influence the opportunities of everyone in society. Every year I visited my friends and relatives in Ukraine. I was aware of disparities in everyday life of different subgroups in the general public (e.g. by profession, by age, by socio-economic status etc.) in both countries. Therefore, I was very excited to work in a project bringing my two homes and people from these two homes together.

Furthermore, I really enjoy cycling and use my bike daily. Spending three weeks on a bike motivated me highly to participate in the ASA global program and to become part of the Velomarathon 2019 management team.



**Picture 1:** Oleksandr from Odessa, Ukraine, and me at our arrival in Cottbus, Germany, on 13 September 2019.

But not only the sportive and management side of the project were interesting for me. I sought to become an excellent team leader, to personally grow and to work with people with and without visual impairments. Social and cultural topics along with corporations are of interest for me. Education for sustainable development via promoting inclusion with the help of this international inclusive youth exchange was another reason for me to join the international “I see! I can! I will!” Velomarathon 2019 project.

These were all factors for me to apply for the project of organising a bicycle marathon as part of the ASA global program. The bicycle marathon was the international Velomarathon 2019. It was a tandem bicycle tour for young adults aged 18 years to 25 years from Germany, Poland and Ukraine. Four people without and four people with visual impairments per country participated in the project. Further, two group leaders and one group assistant joined every national group. A person without visual impairments was sitting in the front of a tandem bicycle acting as a “pilot”. A person with visual impairments was the “navigator” at the back seat.

The journey started in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, on 29 August 2019. After cycling of one week in South-Western Ukraine and visiting Rohatyn, Lviv as well as Mostyska, the journey continued in Poland. Cycling through Southern Poland for one more week, passing by Tarnow, Krakow and Katowice. To satisfy the conditions of our funding institutions of spending one week in each country, we had to transfer via bus from Katowice to the German border. We crossed the German border in Bad Muskau by foot and had a guided tour in the Fürst-Pückler-Park. During our tour in Germany we cycled through Cottbus and Storkow, ending up in Berlin. In Berlin, we met the deputies Martin Patzelt (CDU) and Thomas Nord (The Left) and discussed with them the topic of inclusive international youth exchanges.



## How did we get there?

The management phase of the project began in Fürstenwalde, Germany, on 1 April 2019. It ended in Lviv, Ukraine, on 28 August 2019 with the arrival of the participants for the three weeks of the youth exchange.

In Fürstenwalde Martin Wonde (Germany), Mariia Mostova (Ukraine), Angelika Pidhomna (Ukraine) and myself (Germany) met for the first time on 1 April 2019. Klaus Waiditschka introduced the state of the project and all necessary tasks to us. He acted as our mentor throughout the entire project.

Klaus Waiditschka is a social pedagogue focussing of non-school education of youth and adults, working for Jugendhilfe und Sozialarbeit e.V. (JuSeV). JuSeV is an organisation that acts as a training agency and an approved youth support agency. The target group of JuSeV includes children, teenagers and adults. It concentrates among other areas on various fields of work regarding pedagogical and psycho-social work.

Mariia and Angelika already participated in the previous Ukrainian Velomathon. The Velomathon is the idea of the co-founder of the non-profit and non-governmental organisation Institute of Ukrainian Studies (IUS), Mykola Pekh. He got the vision of the Velomathon after his experience of a tandem ride abroad and a successful “Run for the sake of children” with his friend Andriy Maksymovych in 2006. After Mykola’s sudden death in 2014, the team of IUS decided to implement the Velomathon project in his memory.



**Picture 2:** The management team during the Advanced Planning Visit (APV) in Lviv, Ukraine, on 7 July 2019.

The first cycling marathon took place in 2015 and lasted for a month covering Central and Western Ukraine. This first Ukrainian Velomathon and its follow ups were initiated and coordinated by Viktoria Luchka. Viktoria produced a full-length documentary “I See” with audio description for the blind that premiered at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York City. She served as a mentor from the Ukrainian side and supported our team in the areas of public relations as well as logistics.

From the Polish side we engaged Fundacja Kopalnia Inicjatyw, a Polish a non-profit and non-governmental organisation. The aim of the organisation is to assist in the formation of responsible and creative young people as well as actively shaping their own lives.

A further cooperation partner in the implementation of the project was the Ukrainian non-profit and non-governmental organisation Fight for Right. We also received support from the Polish non-governmental organisation Hetman who promotes sports among people with visual impairments.

## Which tasks did we have?

From 1 April 2019 till the beginning of the Velomathon in the end of August 2019 we had to complete various diverse tasks.

The first task to take care of was the planning of the budget, I was assigned the task of calculating, managing and overseeing the budget of the Velomathon 2019. I designed an effective budget for the three weeks of the project. As we had different funding for the week in Germany, the week in Poland and the week in Ukraine, I had to ensure that every national organisation takes all expenses within their individual budget. I presented the budget during the Advanced Planning Visit in Lviv, Ukraine, on 6 July 2019.

Besides managing the budget, I took over the route planning for the Velomathon 2019 part in Germany. This task included to set up a schedule for the German route, find accommodation along the route, plan the activities along the route and coordinate our trip with different stakeholders.



**Picture 3:** Offering the public to try a tandem bicycle in Storkow, Germany, on 15 September 2019.

Additionally, we wanted to raise awareness about our project and therefore, we had to take over many tasks in the field of public relations. Thus, we had publicity strategies, wrote press releases, spoke publicly in interviews and organised press conferences to raise awareness about our project in the general public of all three countries. We made it to the national television channels Television Service of News (TSN) in Ukraine and Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB) in Germany. At the end of the project we had to analyse our media coverage.

We oversaw numerous other additional tasks, including searching, organising as well as renting tandem bicycles, translating various documents plus webpages, setting up an accessibility check and many more.

For the whole trip we had to attract participants with and without visual impairments from Germany, Ukraine and Poland. We established the requirements for the participants and discussed whom we need. For the participants from Germany, together with Martin we searched for applicant sources via contacting universities, non-governmental organisations, schools, media, internet sites and many more. Martin took over the task of arranging the travel of the participants.



**Picture 4:** Article in the German daily newspaper “Sächsische Zeitung” on 15 September 2019.

## Where did the five months of preparation lead us to?

The preparation, organisation and management of the international Velomarathon 2019 led us to three wonderful, interesting and enriching weeks in a German-Polish-Ukrainian group. The group was mixed in age, gender, impairments and nationalities.

*“In Mostyska we again were welcomed by local people. They shown [sic!] us their Museum, told a lot of interesting stories about the town and then made a real celebration with fabulous dinner, grill meat and live music. It was so hospitable from their side, after hard cycling under the bad weather and rain we felt as at a family birthday or wedding party” (Oleh and Vika, participants, Ukraine).*

The participants got to know each other and learned from each other. People with and without visual impairments from different countries cycled together on a tandem bicycle. They learned to react to each other and to interact. The hours on the tandem bicycles gave them time to share their experiences in their local, regional and national contexts. Further, they had the possibility to learn each other’s languages which might be useful for them in the future. Many of them, especially Ukrainian, participants concluded after the international Velomarathon 2019 that they want to improve their English language skills.



**Picture 5:** Kick-off event of the international Velomarathon in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, on 30 August 2019.

Another sustainable tool of our project was the introduction of accessibility checks in the museums, city halls, parliaments and other buildings visited along the route. The accessibility check list facilitated the understanding of the different stage of inclusive infrastructure in the German, Polish and Ukrainian cities. We tried to conduct whenever possible an accessibility check of a building and for many of our participants this tool was very helpful. So, they discussed the accessibility of hotels, restaurants, train stations and other not specified structures. We were glad that the accessibility list served as a sustainable impulse for the group to be more aware of the standard of accessibility in their respective home communities.

*“Also, we gave some suggestions to the manager of this place to improve it even more. In general, Tarnow is an accessible city for blind people. There are bus stops with an audio guide which can be found also on the buses” (David and Sebastian, participants, Poland).*

In addition to raising awareness among our participants on accessibility, our team gave feedback to our hosts. Several times they had the possibility to discuss with the management on the inclusiveness of their spaces. This option and several public events allowed us to act as a role model of inclusion.

## Was it easy?

Nobody said it was easy. During the whole project period we faced different bigger and smaller challenges.

A serious challenge was the cooperation with our Polish partner Fundacja Kopalnia Inicjatyw. I believe that the organisation is doing a lot of interesting and successful projects, they have very competent, friendly and engaged staff. Still, they were in a very different situation as there were no interns from their side working four months on the preparation of the Polish part. Furthermore, they were not used to organise a youth exchange which is not in a permanent space but moving every day across the country. All these issues would have been minor ones if the communication would have been smooth. But we did not receive answers from Fundacja Kopalnia Inicjatyw several times and they did not react on our proposals to assist them. In the end everything went well, but it could have been less stressful if better coordination had been possible in the management phase.

This brings me to the second point I would like to address, the challenge of attracting participants. While this was not a problem for Mariia who took care of the Ukrainian side, we had no confirmed participants from the Polish side two weeks prior to the project and struggled a lot with recruiting participants from Germany. We already opened the option for people to join for certain sections of the Velomarathon, as not everyone can or wants to spend three entire weeks on a youth exchange. Still, it was not easy to get enough applications on the German side. I assume that in Germany there is already a very wide variety of youth exchanges, options to spend holidays on interesting projects. So, it is difficult for young people to pick what to do during holidays or after finishing school or studies. This uncertainty in the range of participants lead to difficulties in choosing participants in Ukraine as well, as we needed a parity between people with and without visual impairments for all three weeks.



**Picture 6:** Martin leading ice-breaker activities in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, on 28 August 2019.

The management team further faced the challenge of being the management team on one side but also acting as group leaders on the other side. It was not an ideal combination of tasks for a team of four people with several on-site tasks with a high work volume. While performing during daytime and assisting the participants, we had to discuss the day, organise the next steps, make several calls and document the project in the evenings. Even though most of our team members were strong and independent, they still needed a lot of individual service and attention. I assume that we also contributed to this issue, as

we did not force our participants to take over more responsibilities and doing many things on their own. One basic example is the lack of participants clearing up the tables, separating the dishes and to preparing everything for the dishwasher.

## What did I get from it?

There are numerous diverse lessons from the international Velomarathon 2019 project for everyone. I learned a lot of lessons for and from myself, the ASA global team members, the mentors, the participants, the other actors as well as from every individual stage of the project.

First, I learned a lot about people with visual impairments as it was the first time I interacted and worked with people with visual impairments. It was interesting and enriching to organise the youth exchange for them plus our participants without visual impairments. We learned how to design a homepage for visually impaired people, how to describe the environment on the route and which needs they have in the different public as well as private spaces. It was great to achieve our goal of enabling all our participants to build their confidence, stretch their limits, expand their potentials and connect with each other. We brought many people from different countries, speaking different languages, having unique backgrounds and individual cultures together. During our project we celebrated uniqueness and abilities, rather than disabilities.

Second, I had the opportunity to work in an international team and get to know how we can boost effective productivity with four different backgrounds, opinions as well as visions. We faced different obstacles, worked on many interdependent tasks and had to take multiple important decisions together. But our teamwork insured that we all worked as one and agreed on every step of our international Velomarathon 2019 project. Even though we had to go through ongoing and long taking discussion, we ended up compromising on every step. Further, it was a great benefit that our team was very balanced and everyone of us brought in individual competences which led to the project being successful. In case we were unsecure or needed some guidance, we always could contact our mentors and get some advice, assistance or support from them. It was very important and useful to learn from their wisdom.

Finally, I got to know myself once more. Many discussions, tasks and times brought me to the limits of my capacities. It was a life learning lesson to see how much pressure I can withstand, how much patience I have and how many tasks I can manage simultaneously. At the same time, I learned that even though I like to find solutions, I do not always have to. It is important to take some breaks during such an intense project. Further, I learned to be aware of my environment and whether it is inclusive or not. This does not only concern spaces, but also the way we explain, describe and name things.



**Picture 7:** Castle Festival in Storkow, Germany, on 15 September 2019.

I would love to share all these lessons and many more with people in Germany via for example giving workshops to students of social work, companions of blind people or diverse non-governmental organisations.

## Where to find further information?

Further information and a selection of pictures can be found on

- our webpage [www.velomarathon.org](http://www.velomarathon.org) and
- our Instagram account [www.instagram.com/international\\_velomarathon](https://www.instagram.com/international_velomarathon).

A movie by Max Zavallya (<https://zavallya.pb.gallery/video>) about the international Velomarathon 2019 is currently in the production stage.