



The process of creating the International Charter for Walking

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Abstract

This paper describes in brief the process of creating the International Charter for Walking between 2003 and 2006. Inspired by already existing national and regional manifestos the content and form for the new Charter were established during many extensive discussions between experts throughout the world. During the process it was agreed that the Charter should not only contain goals and principles but also a set of actions for implementation.

Background and objectives

It all started in 2003 at the WALK21 conference in Portland, Oregon, when we concluded it was time to create a Global Manifesto or Charter for Walking (see conference conclusions and presentation by Daniel Sauter). We set out with two objectives: First, the Charter should serve as an internal reference within the walking community to provide a common basis on which new initiatives can grow. Secondly, we wanted to create a worldwide policy platform we could refer to when promoting walking and a platform to which cities, national and international organisations, neighbourhood groups and individuals could sign up to.

The stages of the discussion

During the WALK21 conference in Copenhagen in 2004 we had a closer look at already existing charters and manifestos. Ole Thorson (FEPA) presented the European Charter of Pedestrian Rights, Ellen Vanderslice the US Declaration of Pedestrian Rights, Ian Napier and Ian Kett provided an analysis of the Australian Pedestrian Charter and Tom Franklin told us the success story of the UK Living Streets Manifesto.

Identifying strengths and weaknesses of these we then moved on to draft the International Charter which we discussed again at the 2005 WALK21 conference in Zurich, Switzerland. In addition we carried out a discussion process among interested persons worldwide. The process was concluded just a few weeks prior to this conference in Melbourne. The Charter was brought in its final form by Jim Walker, Bronwen Thornton, Rodney Tolley in collaboration with the author of this paper.

Three points relevant for dissemination

We can highlight three points of the discussions which are relevant for the dissemination of the Charter:

- 1) We decided to have more than just a declaration of the needs and rights of pedestrians and include a set of actions in order to illustrate and substantiate what we mean with each principle.

In the long discussion process we have found, interestingly, that almost all actions are in one way or the other relevant in every city and every country. However, it is clear that they may need to be adapted to the uniqueness of local conditions. We have provided space in the Charter to take care of this.

- 2) The Charter is distinctly drafted pro-walking and not anti-car. It is a document promoting the most sustainable, healthy and socially inclusive form of transport. But, of course, improving the situation for pedestrians also often means to curb the privileges of the car and reduce car dominance.
- 3) We have a document with eight principles and a number of actions attached to each principle which experts all over the world have identified as being the crucial ones to improve walking conditions. Each of us probably would phrase such a Charter somewhat differently. I'm sure we could discuss the wording for a long time. The important thing is that we all agree that the spirit and the content of the Charter is right. And you have noted that any person is free to add actions.

Outlook

This Charter can make a difference and help create healthy, efficient and sustainable communities where people choose to walk if and when it is adopted and taken as a guideline by professionals, politicians and citizens the world over. It can and will serve as a basis for new initiatives within and outside of WALK21.

That is why we call upon cities, states and municipal councils, upon planners, architects, health professionals, developers, artists and upon every citizen to sign this International Charter and support its implementation.

** Daniel Sauter was initiator, main facilitator and co-author of the International Charter for Walking.
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Left: Presentation of the Charter in Sydney , Australia, October 2006



Right: Signing the Charter during the WALK21 conference in Melbourne, Australia, October 2006