All Daily Needs
Within **15 Minutes**

5 min

10 min

Bridge
Without bridge
With bridge

In sustainable cities, cars have only a minor role to play. Instead, people travel from A to B on foot or by bicycle. A start-up called Plan4Better hopes to promote this transition with its planning software, which a number of municipalities have already adopted.

When it comes to deciding where to build a new footpath or cycle lane, many officials rely on gut feeling alone. Specialist planning software does exist, but only for road traffic. As a result, many project proposals end up gathering dust in desk drawers and never actually come to fruition.

Plan4Better hopes to change precisely that. Founded in January 2021, the start-up is the brainchild of Elias Pajares, Ulrike Jehle and Majk Shkurti. While studying for his Master's degree at TUM's Chair of Urban Structure and Transport Planning in 2017, Pajares started to develop a software solution called the Geo Open Accessibility Tool, or GOAT. This makes it possible to model reachable destinations for pedestrians and cyclists.

Majk Shkurti joined as a freelance software developer in 2018. Ulrike Jehle came on board in 2019 while completing her Master's thesis. With the team complete, the trio knew they were working on something that deserved more than to gather dust in a desk drawer. The result is a tool for planners in municipalities, counties and planning offices.

Planning reachable destinations

When a user opens the program, the first thing they see is a map of their city. They can then choose any starting point and view how far they could travel within 5, 10 or 15 minutes by foot or by bicycle. The map also includes public amenities and sites of public interest, such as bakeries, mailboxes and clothes stores.

Users can enter new footpaths and cycleways in just a couple of clicks. The software then immediately calculates the resulting accessibility improvements. Another functionality is the ability to enter a new kindergarten, for example, and view how many people live within a 15-minute radius. The trio have been supported in developing the tool by Professor Gebhard Wulfhorst, Dr. Benjamin Büttner and the entire team at the Chair of Urban Structure and Transport Planning. Plus, in an effort to ensure the software is genuinely practical, Plan4Better has collaborated closely with the municipal authorities in Fürstenfeldbruck and Freising and the City of Munich from the very outset. "Workshops with practitioners enabled us to identify what works well and where we needed to make improvements," says Jehle.

However, creating a good product is only half the battle; entrepreneurial expertise is also essential. TUM Start-up Consulting assisted in this respect. In addition, Plan4Better was accepted into the TUM Venture Lab Built Environment and invited to take part in the XPRENEURS program at UnternehmerTUM – which included numerous training events on topics such as sales strategies and marketing.

Start-up and innovation awards

In recent years, Plan4Better has won numerous awards, including the Smart Country Startup Award in the "Smart City" category from German digital association Bitkom, the Munich Innovation Prize in the "Emission-free Mobility in Munich" category from the City of Munich, and the Startup Award from the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi). In November 2021, the start-up launched a three-year research project, GOAT 3.0. With over €500,000 in funding, the majority provided by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport, the project aims to expand GOAT with functionalities including accessibility analyses for on-demand services and journeys using a combination of transport types, such as cycling and public transport.

Meanwhile, however, Plan4Better has already secured its first paying customer: the City of Freiburg. Negotiations are currently ongoing with other cities in Germany, Switzerland and the USA. The City of Munich has also used GOAT in handling a handful of planning issues. "It would obviously be a dream if Munich, our base, were to adopt our software for the long term and make it available to all its planners," says Jehle.

◼   *Claudia Doyle*

In nur 15 Minuten an jeden Ort   D

Nachhaltige Städte brauchen kurze Wege. Plan4Better will dazu beitragen, dass jeder von seiner Wohnung aus in nur 15 Minuten zu Fuß oder mit dem Fahrrad alle Orte von öffentlichem Interesse erreichen kann. ▢

Link
www.plan4better.de

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