

The Role of Education for Sustainable Urban Mobility

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Abstract

The paper covers the current status of the implemented education on mobility management in the frames of the CIVITAS ECCENTRIC Project in Bulgaria, with a special focus on communication and experimentation of sustainable mobility offers. It is intended to overcome the dual structure of overvalued motorized private transport on the one hand and local public transport and pedestrian and bicycle mobility on the other. Successful mobility management also includes professional marketing that addresses different target groups. The training activities in Ruse encourage various actors, stakeholders and users of public transport and mobility services to adopt sustainable mobility habits in order to make walking and cycling safer and a more desirable way of travelling in the neighborhood and periphery. Particular emphasis focuses on road safety to raise public awareness and reduce the risk of road accidents.

Keywords: education; training; mobility management; road safety.

1. Introduction

The theme of smart, green and integrated transport has been identified as one of the major societal challenges addressing new mobility concepts, transport organisation, logistics, transport systems safety and security, environmental issues (reduction of greenhouse gases, air pollution and noise), and urban planning (new concepts for bringing work and living closer together). It has an important impact both at the economic and social levels (new companies' creation, employment, social inclusion, housing and logistics). The overarching aim is to improve the quality of life of European citizens 60% of whom live in urban areas where much of Europe's economic performance is generated. To address liveability in cities, urban mobility plays a crucial role due to its cross-sector nature. It affects quality of life, public health, and urban environment. But sustainable urban mobility can only be achieved if breakthrough innovations leading to greener, more inclusive, safer and smarter solutions are found. Failing to achieve this will – in the long run - result in high societal, ecological, and economic costs. However, new innovative mobility concepts – in particular when individual means of transportation are to be replaced by public and collective means of transport – should be accepted by citizens. Bringing about behavioural changes with no disadvantages for the quality of life and the cost of living in urban areas is one of the great challenges to be addressed in this area.

As a partner in the CIVITAS ECCENTRIC project, the Bulgarian Mobility coordinator and SUMP Focal point CSDCS decided to answer to this challenge by developing an intensive training and awareness rising campaign in the City of Ruse.

2. Methodology

The overall objective of the CIVITAS ECCENTRIC project is: To demonstrate and test the potential and replicability of integrated and inclusive urban planning and sustainable mobility measures that increase the quality of life of all citizens in urban areas, with a focus on suburban districts.

One of the main tasks of CSDCS in the frames of ECCENTRIC is to create awareness of the need for sustainable mobility and its benefits for the quality of life of the citizens. The aim is to encourage the various actors, stakeholders and users of public transport and mobility services, to embrace sustainable mobility habits, making walking and cycling safer and a more desirable way of travelling in the peripheral district. A series of seminars and round table discussions were organized with different citizens groups and decision-makers with a special focus on traffic safety. In the long term, this awareness raising campaign aims to change the travel mode of people, from using cars to using more active modes of mobility, such as walking and cycling. CSDCS decided to develop a special methodology addressing different target groups and providing tailor-made training programs for each of them. The main challenge for all of them was to involve the participants in the events and to establish a dialogue thus detecting their main mobility needs and constraints.

2.1. Training concept

CSDCS maintains the SUMP/ENDURANCE network being in permanent contacts with the stakeholders at national level. The organization has relevant information about the training needs of different stakeholders' groups and permanently updates this information using primary and secondary sources. For the CIVITAS ECCENTRIC Project CSDCS has developed a special strategy aiming to engage different target groups in the learning process thus raising the awareness about the new mobility measures to be introduced, collecting data about the travel habits and needs of the local population, teaching people on road safety and security and last but not least - providing support for the implementation of the sustainable urban mobility plan (SUMP) in the city of Ruse. The proposed 1-day seminars and workshops encompass 20-25 participants and include theoretical and practical work with a lot of examples of good practices on mobility. Having in mind that not everybody has access to internet and speaks English, training packages with a lot of translated and printed materials are provided to the participants according to their needs. A questionnaires are disseminated after each event for providing relevant feedback.

2.2. Made by professionals

According to CEREMA (Feb.2018), CSDCS has the largest expertise in mobility and SUMP in Bulgaria and the trainers are members of this organization having successfully developed and implemented more than 30 EU projects in transport, environment and social area. In the development of the training curricula they used the experience gained from a series of mobility projects funded by IEE, SEE, H2020, INTERREG EUROPE and DTP (BENEFIT, EPOMM PLUS, ELTIS PLUS, ENDURANCE, BUMP, TRANSDANUBE, LAST MILE, TRANSDANUBE.pearls, CIVITAS ECCENTRIC and CIVITAS PROSPERITY).

2.3. Addressing different target groups

During the research and planning phase, CSDCS established first the stakeholders' list. The goal was to encompass all the relevant stakeholders influencing the decision making process and shaping the public opinion in the target peripheral region and on the whole territory of the city. The transport experts and the ordinary citizens of Ruse had no information about sustainable mobility and its importance for improving the quality of life. Mobility still does not exist as a discipline in the High education and in the local Technical University. There is a lack of curricula on mobility and road safety for pupils and students, which contributes to a high risk of traffic accidents with pedestrians.

The main objective of the training is to raise awareness of the necessity and benefits of sustainable mobility in the city of Ruse and its importance for improving the quality of life. CSDCS has planned seven 1-day events: a special training for transport professionals (employees in the Ruse municipality and in several local transport firms), six workshops for six different target groups: citizens in the target neighborhood, NGOs working in environmental and social areas, school children, academia (staff and doctoral students from the Ruse Technical

University), disabled people (suffering from physical and mental diseases) and decision makers (politicians, public opinion leaders, local and regional administration officers).

Three mobility conferences are also planned for giving forum to all interested parties and to encourage the various stakeholders to adopt sustainable mobility habits by making walking and cycling safer and a more comfortable way of travelling in urban conglomerations.

3. Implementation of the tasks

The training events are accompanied by a large media campaign in order to inform as much people as possible about the initiative and to encourage people to participate. Since February 2017 CSDCS has successfully performed five training seminars – for professionals in transport (in February 2017); for local citizens (in May 2017), for Ruse NGOs involved in green issues and transport safety (in September 2017), for school children (December 2017) and for academics - teaching staff and doctoral students from the Ruse Technical University (in May 2018).

The First ECCENTRIC Conference was organized on 19th October 2018 in Ruse with a topic on “Social aspects of Mobility” The event has been extremely interesting and has given rise to a broad media response. Reports were presented on projects related to transport, mobility and tourism in Ruse. Prof. Dr. V. Pencheva from the Ruse Technical University outlined the directions for the development of the mobility and the main social aspects of the implemented measures. The plenary was followed by a business lunch and roundtable discussion on Green Public Procurements and their application in transport.

The second and the third Conferences are planned for 2019 and 2020. By the end of the project in September 2020 over 500 city officials, academics, businesses, citizens and their organizations will take part in the learning process. It will prove that when planning for sustainable mobility, citizen involvement is crucial. In order to work in a socially inclusive way, all target groups should be represented. Special interest groups such as the elderly, young children, young families or people suffering from a mental or physical handicap are often overlooked or hard to reach. The learning will engage these groups effectively in a planning process.

4. Challenges and results

The most important challenges in the implementation were related to the interest of the participants. After so many activities and events since 2000 that have produced almost no results, the Bulgarian stakeholders are tired and difficult to justify participating in further project events. The most important success factors for the learning process are the good cooperation with the municipality, the high political support for the project in Ruse, the CSDCS participatory approach to the involvement of participants (tailor-made seminars for each target group), the possibility for discussions and dialogue, a well-organized invitations and attractive agendas of the seminars. A long-term cooperation with the local media and their sometimes even cost-free support is very helpful.

It is recommended to set up specific agendas for the various target groups and take their needs into account when presenting the materials. Particular emphasis should be placed on road safety and on disadvantaged groups (children, the elderly, handicapped people, etc.). Academic presentations are not interesting for the general public, but people like very much illustrated examples, short films showing some good practices from other cities with similar problems, and the opportunity for discussion and exchange of opinions among participants.

The common discussions on the planned project mobility measures and the Ruse SUMP contributed to having support from the part of the citizens that are usually against changes. For the first time after the political changes in 90s local people felt empowered and important seeing that their opinion matters. Till present there has been insufficient debate on the urban policies and the necessary urban regeneration. The project demonstrated how to use the learning as a means to achieve social cohesion and the city and/or urban neighbourhoods as active contexts for that process. Further theoretical discussion, methodological reflection and empirical analysis are required for a better understanding of the city both as a learning environment and as a learning resource – not least in order to be able to take this dimension into account effectively in the context of urban cohesion policies. The development of learning communities and the learning context that should support contemporary processes of urban innovation is an example of the link between learning, the city as a pro-active learning context and the strengthening of social cohesion. More socially creative cities can be established by active involvement of citizens in governance mechanisms and reconstructed area based on project partnerships.

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