Adaptive Strategies for Mobility Planning in Remote and Coastal Cities and Towns - "LAST MILE" project case

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Short abstract:

Mobility and Accessibility are vital elements for sustainable urbanization with a direct impact on climate change. The INTERREG Europe Project "LAST MILE" is presented with its focus on developing adaptive strategies providing user oriented services for the travel chain's last segment in remote tourism destinations and coastal cities and towns.

Introduction

Mobility and Accessibility are vital elements for sustainable urbanization but there is a need to change the current supply driven approach which gives preference to cars, and adopt a new planning paradigm focusing on people. Transport must remain at the heart of urban planning, providing sustainable solutions to mobility needs through the introduction of transport systems that focus on access, safety and efficiency within the larger context of reducing the need to travel in urban areas. Sustainable transport is included in seven of the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda and is directly covered by 5 targets and indirectly by 7 targets. Four possible goals are considered important: Accessibility, Efficiency; Safety; and Climate respect. From the other hand upholding the right of people to travel safely using efficient and sustainable transport networks is a fundamental human right that is described in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights as "freedom of movement". This is why many EU projects aim to connect people to adequate transport services in rural communities, to reduce congestion in cities, and to link urban and rural areas by sustainable means of transport.

1. Project objectives

The LAST MILE project (INTERREG EUROPE, 2016 – 2020) aims to find innovative, flexible solutions for sustainable regional mobility systems. It wants to offer visitors the possibility to travel the 'last mile' of their travel chain sustainably and, at the same time, provide alternatives to car use for residents on their daily trips.

The project sets a concrete focus on the problematic accessibility of the last link of the travel chain from origin to destination (the so called "last mile") and collects and analyses solutions to cover this bottleneck with sustainable modes of transport. The environmental benefit and resource- and cost-efficiency in the long run are considered.

LAST MILE aims, among others, at pointing out how sound institutional framework facilitate the implementation of especially demand-responsive transport (public, sharing, pooling). The project will take on-board lessons learnt here, to further encourage at a later stage of the project partners and regional stakeholders to implement new successful approaches from other regions in Europe when preparing their regional action plans.

Transfer of best practices and innovative approaches to regional policies is also an aim of LAST MILE project. The 6 regional project partners have elaborated a set of regional reports analyzing their territories in relation to the status-quo of sustainable mobility, flexible transport and tourist activity. This exercise is the first step towards building a backbone of the interregional exchange.

Regional reports have been consolidated and summarized in a Synopsis Report that deals with analyses of the institutional frameworks and barriers of each region and the evaluation of good practices, and identifies common opportunities and challenges shared among all regions.

2. **Methodological approach**

The project focuses on user oriented services for the travel chain's last segment in remote destinations offering and promoting door-to-door accessibility. Still, in terms of the full distance to cover between origin and destination, there is often a bottleneck on the last link of the journey, i.e. the distance between the regional railway station and accommodations. This missing link is crucial for deciding what kind of transport to use. Experiences have shown that a demand-responsive transport system combined with regular public transport is a thankful enhancement in many cases. The last-mile problem can be solved by introducing a variety of flexible transport services (FTS) making the transportation multimodal, on-demand, seasonal, shared, and increasing passengers' choice and convenience. The overall transportation system step by step becomes more digital and therefore more efficient by better matching demand and supply.

Last Mile aims at developing adaptive strategies for providing user oriented services for the travel chain's last segment in remote tourism destinations and coastal areas of 6 European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia and Spain. These countries are situated in different European areas but all have remote tourism destinations with difficult accessibility for visitors. In the Alpine regions of Upper Austria, on the Black sea coast of Bulgaria, in the natural parks of Luxembourg, in West-Pomeranian coastal zone of Poland, in the mountain region near Kosice in Slovakia and High Pyrenees in Spain still major transport systems face difficulties in achieving last-mile connectivity, so people have to travel by car or take a taxi. This missing link is crucial for deciding what kind of transport to use. Experiences have shown that a demand-responsive transport system combined with regular public transport is a thankful enhancement in many cases. The last-mile problem can be solved by introducing a variety of flexible transport services (FTS) making the transportation multimodal, on-demand, seasonal, shared, and increasing passengers' choice and convenience. The overall transportation system step by step becomes more digital and therefore more efficient by better matching demand and supply.

In the frames of the project 7 partners from 6 countries ask for common solutions for the mobility services in the last mile. The major part of activities is dedicated to exchange of experience between the participating regions. Study visits have been performed in every country in order to demonstrate the existing last-mile mobility solutions. The best practices were evaluated in terms of impact on the climate change, sustainability and transferability. Actually they are part of the Good Practices Collection of the IE program thus supporting the International Public–Private Platform named "Global Partnership for Sustainable Transport" which focuses on three main areas:

- Promoting best practices in mobility and accessibility
- Starting dialogues – encouraging governments and businesses to talk about transport sustainability and come up with concrete solutions.

• Working in partnership with other projects and initiatives promoting resilient and sustainable cities and transport.

3. Project implementation

The project is developing on 2 phases. The Phase 1 (April 2016- September 2018) started with a thorough research including 3 different joint analyses, which build the backbone of the INTERREG exchange:

- Analysis of the national legal and institutional frameworks and economic aspects related to sustainable demand-responsive/flexible transport systems and the identification of the barriers that are hindering the implementation of especially small scale systems in remote areas/hinterland
- Analysis of the technical state-of-the-art of sustainable transport, in particular of flexible systems in the different regions
- Analysis and evaluation of existing practices in regional flexible transport policies. This joint research evaluates good practices of and beyond the regions, taking into account former best practice collections of other projects as well. During the study visits the regional approach including the specific framework conditions, financing structures and the concrete mobility systems is discussed and evaluated using two specific questionnaires prepared by CSDCS. In this regard, potentials for optimization or innovation are identified, and if applicable concrete solution approaches are elaborated.

The analyses prepared by each partner region were consolidated and summarized thus allowing the preparation of a **Synthesis and policy recommendations.** Based on the results, it derives recommendations for policy makers at different levels. They were used for elaborating regional adaptive strategies for mobility planning with Action Plans **for implementing flexible transport services** that prepare actions and investments to improve the door-to-door accessibility of peripheral tourist/recreational destinations benefitting also the inhabitants. These strategies will make sure that lessons learned from the research and interregional exchanges are integrated in the regional policies. Actions defined will be put in practice during the Phase 2 of the project (October 2019 – March 2021).

4. Outcomes of the research

For all project partners the project is a real challenge because of the need to introduce the modern concept of Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) in the transport schemes of remote and coastal regions where the transport connections are rather scarce and are not a priority to local governments. The Bulgarian case is very indicative, because the Black sea resort region of Varna abounds of attractive tourism landmarks (sand beaches, pictoresque lagoons, roman remains, rain-forest parks, etc.) that can be accessed only by car becaus eof the lack of public transport.

The Bulgarian partner CSDCS analyzed the national legal and institutional frameworks and the economic aspects related to sustainable mobility services and the identification of the barriers hindering their implementation in remote areas. The goal was to elaborate a strategy for implementing flexible transport measures that prepares actions and investments to improve the door-to-door accessibility of remote coastal recreational destinations. It was elaborated with the large collaboration with all levels of decision-makers in the region, tourism and transport experts, as well as a large public participation. A series of awareness raising events and public consultations were conducted for identifying the most appropriate strategic measures for improving the accessibility.

To establish contact with and to sell the last mile idea to players in the fields of tourism, transport, and environment (tourist entrepreneurs, transport authorities, protected area management, local politicians etc.) who might have a vested interest in the policy or project, and whose involvement could have a positive financial or political impact was crucial for the project's success. For the first time the tourism and transport sectors in Bulgaria meet and discuss their common problems and interests having the possibility to exchange experience with more advanced European regions. The project made it possible to bring together all the important subjects involved in people's mobility to try and find points in common and to encourage partnerships both locally and across borders.

5. Conclusions

As a result of the project, adaptive strategies were elaborated and Regional Action Plans were set in all 6 regions. For the Varna coastal area in Bulgaria the strategy was developed with focus on how to bring people and places together by creating relevant flexible transport services rather than simply increasing the length of urban transport infrastructure or increasing the number of movements of visitors.

As Varna coastal region and the other 5 project regions are tourism destinations, the project outcomes would be: improved urban-rural connectivity; improved regional environmental/climate conditions; strengthened institutional capacity for tourism destination management; and effective project implementation and knowledge management. This project represents one more step to the appeal of a seamless, technologically-facilitated transportation ecosystem, universally accessible yet designed for maximum efficiency and site-specificity.

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