

Sustainable urban mobility: what does it mean for European cities?

Interview with Charlotte Halpern

3 EU funded projects on sustainable urban mobility

Charlotte Halpern : Over the past 5 years, I have been involved in 3 different European projects. Those projects involved not just universities—there were only 2-3 universities involved in each of these consortiums—but also some transport authorities, some city authorities that were all involved in order to explore different innovative actions that could be both developed but also implemented on the ground. Those projects were highly international in the sense that they brought a minimum of 9 to 12 different European countries together in order to think about the challenges related to sustainable mobility.

The [CREATE](#) project focused on the changing rule of cars in cities. Then we worked, as part of the [MORE](#) project, on how to think about contested street spaces. And finally as part of the [SUMP-PLUS](#) project, we explored the way through which those objectives and this ambition could be not just developed within the big cities in Europe but also transferred to medium and small-size cities as well as brought under the umbrella of the climate plans.

Beyond technological and behaviour changes?

C.H. : As part of those research projects, we took a different starting point. We believe that on the one hand technologies and changing behaviours can be one of the ways through which those objectives can be achieved. However we also believe that there should be a lot of thinking devoted to how governance and public policies may contribute to steering this process.

As part of the [CREATE](#) project we focused more specifically on how cities have developed public policies aimed at developing some alternatives to the rule of the car. For example, developing public transport or developing walking and cycling. We also focused on the different ways through which cities have tried to reorganise their streetspace either by developing new uses of streets—we can very easily think about how to develop some coffees, for example, but we could also think about how to use the street spaces in order to do some more greening initiatives, not just in the city centre but also in the outskirts of those cities.

We can also think about different types of policies—and this is what we developed in the context of [SUMP-PLUS](#)—through which cities may integrate transport together with health issues, with education, in order to rethink the way a number of trip generating sectors such as education and health may reduce and cut down the travel demand by introducing and aligning their objectives together with those of the transport sector.

Coordinating a great variety of stakeholders

C.H. : Multilevel governance is one of the characteristics of the EU. So let's face it, we're not going to get rid of it in the next 30 years and especially not if we are to think and bring those actors together in order to deliver on those ambitious goals. So part of the work we've done has been to try to overcome or to work together in spite of those contradictions and potential competition between those different levels.

One of the ways to achieve that has been to support some soft cooperation mechanisms. And this is something that we have developed for example together with the city of Antwerp or the city of Klaipeda. In the case of Klaipeda [in Lithuania], to think together on how to develop some cycling lanes with not just focus on the city centre but cut across those different municipality borders and help and ensure that incoming traffic from adjacent municipalities could go through the city centre and throughout the entire region. So those are the kind of policies that we have been trying to enforce.

Another way to think about it is to bring together also businesses and NGOs in order to also involve the private sector and to engage some of the citizens.

Recommendations for national states and the EU

The most obvious targets are of course city authorities. However, as part of the recommendations we've made, especially at the end of the [SUMP-PLUS](#) project, we also tried to bring national states as well as the EU back into the picture.

On the one hand, national states, as part of the recovery plans and as part of the green plan objective from the EU, have invested or committed themselves to invest massive budgets in order to fund the shift towards electric mobility—for private cars but also for public transport. However, there is not enough budget that has been put forward in order to support cycling initiatives for example or walking initiatives or to just reorganise the way through which cities are being planned and organised.

When it comes to the EU, let us remind ourselves that cities have no official role to play within the current treaties. Region authorities are the direct partners of the EU through the committee of the regions but cities are only involved through some specific networks or through different lobbying initiatives. This is a way to remind the EU to bring cities more regularly into the picture, to involve them regularly in all the decisions that have to be made at EU level, which will impact those cities, in order to get their buy-in but also to make sure they will be involved in the delivery of those ambitious objectives.

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