

Mobilsamåkning AB, Sweden – a ridesharing application

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Preconditions, inspiration, nurture

Mobilsamåkning started out in 2011 as a pure bottom-up initiative by a group of villagers in Tolg, outside the city of Växjö in Småland, south-eastern Sweden. It was awarded *rural innovation of the year* by Hela Sverige ska leva (www.helasverige.se) that year.

The problem they wanted to address was limited public transport to the nearest urban center and plenty of cars on the road with only one person per car. The villagers felt the need to reduce their negative environmental impact, and to improve the range of mobility solutions for those without a car. They also wanted to strengthen the social relations in the village and create new meeting places. *So, you could say that Mobilsamåkning is not just a technical mobility solution but a social innovation for rural development!*

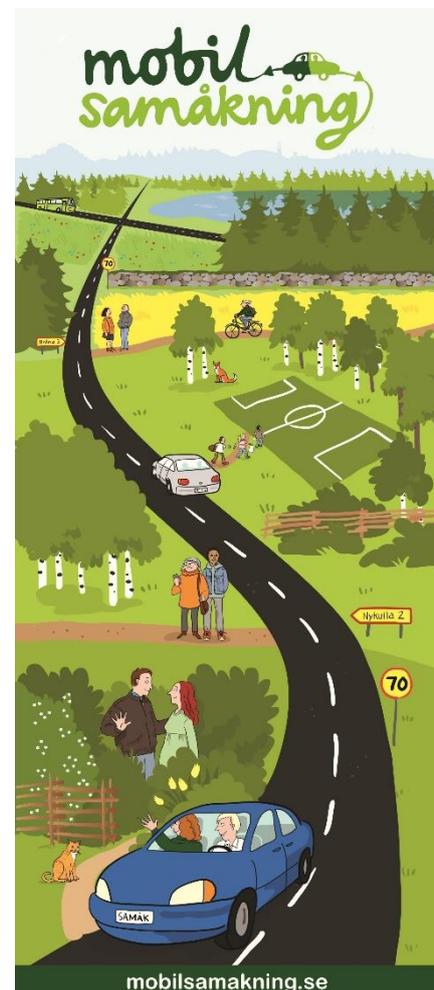
Through LEADER, they could finance their pilot project and get started. They even had an IT person in the group who built the first version of the app that coordinates drivers and passengers.

The villagers made sure to address different habits, needs and socio-cultural factors among the villagers. E.g. people with older mobile phones can use the system via a laptop plus SMS while smart phone users use only the app. Children and teenagers are also included, often via their parents' accounts. Fares and pick-up/drop-off places were decided by the users.

Safety and knowing who you will drive, or ride with, is very important. Interested villagers must sign up and be approved by the local administrators before they can use the service.

The following target groups were identified initially and seem to remain over time:

- Work commuters, these are *the back-bone* of the ridesharing service, to make it work
- Kids and teenagers without drivers-licenses/cars
- Green lifestyle pursuers who might recently have left town for the country side
- Villagers with hobbies that require a ride (soccer, music lessons, etc.)



- Retirees with time and desire to help/drive others and meet people in their cars
- Villagers longing for more socializing and meeting places – in cars and elsewhere

In general, about 25 % of the population in a village will start using a ridesharing service like Mobilsamåkning after some initial marketing to encourage behavioral change, such as accepting the idea of driving your neighbors – or to have a neighbor drive your child. This is a conclusion drawn by Mobilsamåkning based on user statistics from 16 attempts to implement their system in Sweden (of which 13 succeeded). This also implies that around 75 % of people in any given community are not interested in ridesharing, i.e. they don't like the idea of driving others or asking others for a ride. Peppe Klaassen is not too surprised. He thinks this reflects Swedish culture and some common characteristics of Swedes: praising individualism and the ability to self-sustainment.

In Tolg, the place where Mobilsamåkning was first implemented, more than 30 % of villagers now are registered users of the application. This is a very high share. Mobilsamåkning always seeks to identify the 25 % interested members of a community – based on the target groups listed of above – during the initiation phase, through lectures, mailings, a launch event, etc.

The economic aspects are important, as a trigger to make people use the system. When villagers (or a local development group) have decided to start using Mobilsamåkning, they also make a collective decision on a fare per kilometer, to at least partially cover their driving expenses. The fare should be on par with public transport. It is not the ambition to compete with busses or train services but to complement their schedule. To avoid having to pay the fare in cash after each ride, electronic bills are sent out quarterly by the Mobilsamåkning system that registers every ride. Payments are made electronically as well.

The villagers using the system/app will benefit and save money by getting their driving expenses partially covered while driving others. But it is crucial to ensure that the system doesn't develop into an illegal taxi service. The system registers expenses and payments to and from all users and accumulates this in a report to Skatteverket (the Swedish tax authority). In their individual tax declarations, the village drivers can then easily confirm that they did not earn any extra money from driving others. They only got their driving expenses partially covered.

Legal aspects: Because the system is transparent and not income generating – it only covers drivers' costs or expenses – the ridesharing service has been approved by Skatteverket, in line with current legislation. I.e. it is not deemed as a taxi service. This was also confirmed by the Swedish national committee of inquiry called 'Taxiutredningen' in its final report in December 2016 (SOU 2016:86).

Picture 1 Mobilsamåkning in practice. Source: Bo Palm.



Implementation

Mobilsamåkning is registered as a regular company, AB but with limited profit-making ambition. In its statutes, it is underlined that it will re-invest any profits in rural development and that the main objective is to contribute to stronger (and more attractive) rural regions.

Resources: Sustainable financing of this system has two dimensions: financing the continuous development and spreading of the Mobilsamåkning app/solution itself; and secondly, the sustainable management of the system in each village. As already mentioned, Mobilsamåkning started out as a LEADER project, which turned into a social business, which turned into a private company (AB) with shareholders, albeit with limited revenue goals. The owners are currently striving to develop a new, more self-explanatory version of the app, that will generate enough revenue for the owners so they can scale up and implement it in more rural areas or villages (see section below).

At the village level, financing the initial phase, including marketing and implementation of the system can also be a challenge. The goal is to make the app so easy to use that it takes minimal time to get people started. And the cost for using it is covered and shared via small fees paid to Mobilsamåkning AB for each ride. Still, villages that want to start using the app will need some funding for marketing, a local survey of interest, a launch event, etc. Many times, there are rural development funds available at the municipal level. EU funds are less optimal to use since the application process is lengthy and

administration heavy. To make sure villagers sign up and start using the service, a degree of unpaid work seems to be inevitable by a core group of convinced villagers. Constant marketing and discussion with other villagers is needed to make the system work.

Enablers and barriers during the implementation phase

Peppe Klaassen underlines that successful implementation relies entirely on villagers being involved *bottom-up*. Ideally, this means that some 25-40 people need to be committed to using the system regularly and change their driving behavior so the community can reap the benefits of ridesharing (see chapter 3 below). Klaassen has seen several failed attempts when a municipality or regional authority decided to introduce the system top-down. This simply doesn't work.

Since the beginning in 2011, Mobilsamåkning has identified the following enablers or common denominators of villages that has successfully implemented their system/app:

- Villages located quite near (30-50 km) one or two urban centers, but with limited public transport which often has a single concrete mobility need to meet, for work commuters and for high school students.
- Villages with many children taking music lessons or playing soccer or other sports that require recurrent rides at odd times. Ridesharing takes a lot of pressure off stressed parents who otherwise would have to drive their kids themselves multiple times a week, or organize rideshare themselves.
- Villages with many young retirees interested in driving others and socializing with neighbors
- Villagers with a fair share of 'grönåvågåre', urbanites who recently resettled in the country side to pursue a greener lifestyle. These are often staunch supporters of ridesharing, to save the planet and to make new friends.

Additional enablers are:

- An easy to use application with payments handled by the system
- High level of safety and security – drivers and passengers in the system are all approved by the village administrator or ambassador.
- Continuous marketing: villagers will need continuous reminders to use the system, i.e. to post their rides and travel needs in the system/app.

Bottlenecks occur in villages or areas that are very sparsely populated with limited traffic and few daily commutes to an urban center (e.g. southern Öland).

Villages where most inhabitants have two cars and prefer to drive alone are also difficult to approach. Again, this is a typical thing in Sweden and probably other rich countries where people can afford to have two cars and appreciate the freedom of driving alone, when and where they like to.

It is also clear that one size doesn't fit all. Testing Mobilsamåkning in other countries would probably render different results. Four villages in the Netherlands are testing the solution now. There, most

villages are located closer to cities and many people chose to use their bikes instead of cars, so the situation is different, according to Klaassen.

Conflicts or conflicting interests in the village can certainly cause trouble and hamper implementation. The most common conflicts so far have been with small, local taxi companies and local grocery stores. The solution has been to add taxi reservation as an option on the ridesharing app and explain that it is a different service, always on time. I.e. it still makes sense for villagers to order a taxi rather than ride share when they have a flight to catch. The grocery store can also be included in the system by placing the main drop-off/pick-up place outside and increase traffic there.

The outcomes, effects and further development

The main outcomes and effects of the use of the Mobilsamåkning ridesharing app, i.e. in villages that have successfully implemented it are:

- Increased accessibility to services and pleasure
- Reduced CO₂ emissions and less traffic
- Increased social interaction leading to happier villagers who have been more prone to develop their village and make it more attractive. Many new initiatives were born out of conversations in cars. *Again it's worth underlining that Mobilsamåkning is as much a mobility solution as a social innovation for enhanced social capital.*
- Reduced costs for drivers
- Improved life situation (reduced stress) for parents with kids needing many rides
- More visitors to certain attractions in villages that used to be difficult to reach. Like communal farming places or farm cafés.

Results in figures: In the village Tolg, ca 550 people have been ridesharing 2,248 times, covering about 82,800 km, or two laps around the world, the first four years. That saved the climate from 15.7 tons of CO₂ emissions. The system is currently up and running in 13 villages across Sweden.

The best examples of successful implementation are the following villages:

- Tolg outside Växjö in Småland
- Broddetorp outside Falköping in Västergötland
- Junsele outside Sollefteå in Västerbotten

Southern Öland and a couple of villages in the Gävleborg region are examples of areas where the system was launched and tested but didn't fly. In Öland due to a very low density of people, in Gävleborg mainly due to the top-down approach.

Four villages in the Netherlands are currently testing and implementing a Dutch language version of the application.

Next step in the development of the application is already underway (since autumn 2017) by Peppe Klaassen and a team from Karlstad University and IVL, Swedish Environment Institute. The aim with this collaboration is to develop the app into more of a Mobility as a Service (MaaS) solution, connecting it to many transportation modes but still make it adjustable for different rural regions with varying needs. Connecting ridesharing of people with ridesharing of goods is one vision. Another aim is to further analyze users and non-users, their reasoning and arguments while launching the app in several new places. Still focusing on rural areas.

References

Klaassen, Pepijn 'Peppe', one of the owners of Mobilsamåkning, telephone interview, 22 January 2018