

Reporting from the Rural Mobility Seminar 27 September, Riga

INNOVATION: Mobility Innovations – only for cities?

Background

Drivers of mobility innovations are often large private companies. Naturally, such companies invest where they see the biggest market potential, which is usually in cities. Rural mobility innovations, on the other hand, are rather an offspring of local, sometimes non-commercial initiatives and satisfy different demand patterns. Rural mobility innovations are possible, yet they are hampered by various obstacles. Many of them are structural or legal constraints (just think of the legal barriers to non-commercial car-sharing or combining people-to-service and service-to-people). Another major issue is that too often, innovations tried and tested in the urban context get applied one-on-one to rural regions (where they do not reach their full potential) instead of developing genuine rural approaches. In short: Yes, rural mobility innovations are indeed possible, but they rely on appropriate outer conditions (e.g. legal or structural) as well as a genuine rural setup.

Block 1: Introduction

Key messages:

- There are 15 partners from 6 countries in the MAMBA project that all face challenges in rural mobility.
- Lead partner, Doris Scheer, Diaconie of Schleswig-Holstein: "Mobility affects the attractiveness of the territory as well as interest about it."
- The Challenges of Mobility:
 - Decreased attractiveness of life in rural areas;
 - Decreasing and aging population in rural areas;
 - Reduced access to services / quality of life in rural areas;
 - Public transport difficult to maintain;
- Altogether, 6 MAMBA mobility seminars are planned. Topics will cover: Innovation, Responsibility, Cohesion, Digitalisation, Grassroots, Final Conference.

MAMBA in the Baltic Sea Region Programme (Vineta Griekere, Baltic Sea Region Programme)

- MAMBA: Priority 3 – Transport, Objective 3.2 - Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change

- Mobility is a big challenge MAMBA partnership wants to solve; project is important also for the BSR Programme as it is going to strengthen the capacity of public and private sectors in finding the solutions for mobility issues;
- It is strongly advised to cooperate with stakeholders as well as end-users, to get the most effective solution. Solution finders and end-users need to be sure that the results of the project will be used in the daily life;
- MAMBA is invited to collaborate with other mobility projects in BSR territory, like:
 - MARA - Mobility and Accessibility in Rural Areas -New approaches for developing mobility concepts in remote areas
 - RESPONSE - Demand-Responsive Transport to ensure accessibility, availability and reliability of rural public transport

Block 2: Exploring the Challenge

Dr. Angela Jain about Project “Dörpsmobil” – a model for carsharing in rural areas?

Purpose: Sharing a vehicle for more efficient use

Key messages:

Angela Jain: “We often look at rural regions as a problem, but the people who live there like to live there”

- 1) Transport system 3 categories:
 - a. Main relations – work very well
 - b. Side relations – work, but not so good
 - c. Dispersion – not very well; innovative solutions are needed
- 2) Project E-Carsharing has 3 components: Social participation, mobility solution in rural areas and energy saving, protecting the climate. Moreover, it is not exclusionary and competing for public transport, but complementary mobility solution.
- 3) It is not easy to implement innovations in the transport industry and especially not in public transport. And there is an observation which reflects that even in Germany you can see some innovative and open-minded regions ready to try and innovate while there are many regions which are passive towards innovative solutions.
- 4) This is a solution where at the end the costs should be around zero – to cover the management costs; the viability of the initiative is the key.
- 5) Some tips when trying to find the right solution based on present experience:
 - KISS = Keep It Simple and Stupid;
 - Create something that can be counted as a manual for the self-starters (for anybody willing to implement the same idea);

Determine demand – who requires, what solution will be the best - it is very important to find the specific needs of the place and find the most appropriate solution;
Choose operational model – who will be operators;
If there is a high demand, it can be converted into a business;
Considering that there is going to be a lot of work, volunteers can be involved;
Social participation is very important;
Attention should be pointed at marketing to have successful mobility solutions;
Untraditional solutions always take lots of work hours, think about volunteers – one person cannot do everything.

Panel discussion: What is innovative rural mobility? What are current barriers and enablers of rural mobility innovations?

Take-aways:

- “Local politicians must be firmly convinced that they want people to live in the countryside. This is one of the key points that will help to deliver a successful outcome.”
- Innovation is not just to invent something new. It cannot be only social or technical.
- The support that is needed for the implementation of ideas is not only financial, but also a lot of help is needed, because the implementation of the initiative will require a lot of working hours. “Money helps, but it is not the main factor in cases when there is too much work, but not enough time”.
- Municipalities should serve as a good examples (e.g. share the car they own while it is not busy) and be ready to give a support for the implementation of the initiative.
- Legislation sometimes do not support planned ideas, but sometimes it is still possible to act creatively. You must be sure that you are able to argue convincingly and prove the viability of your idea based on calculations.
- It is necessary to solve these challenges in rural areas to maintain the attractiveness of territory.
- Transport on demand is a very popular solution in the Nordic countries;
- It is important to think about communication – to be convinced that everybody knows about the option; it is important to make pilots, to test solutions.
- Bottom-up approach is key. Cooperation with stakeholders; match specific need with the right solution.
- It is a huge work towards changing the behaviour and attitude before strengthening mobility.
- There is a bright future for platforms where all possible modes of transport and mobility in a specific territory can be found, where it is possible to book, to pay, etc.
- Car-sharing is a good solution to avoid owning 2 cars in one family; or to have the second car but to make it co-sharing car. But there could be barriers for this specific solution - some people could not feel comfortable in one car with unknown people.

- “Projects are a perfect way to find the best solutions for local problems (learning from each other, working for one aim)”
- To hold the local initiative, it is needed to involve the local community.
- There are many challenges for solutions – different for rural and urban areas.
- More cooperation is needed between private, public and NGO sectors.
- Real challenge is staying in your niche and not lose services, when becoming successful.

Zane Gedroviča about Care Mobile of Ronald McDonald House Charities

Purpose: Thinking globally, acting locally to provide resources for children and their families

Key messages:

- 1) The aim of the bus is to bring doctors to children – near their homes, all medical consultations are free of charge
- 2) Close cooperation with local authorities
- 3) Over 30 000 children treated in total, 4 000 children each year in average
- 4) For one doctor’s consultation there should be 20 children. Every time there are many more than 20 children

Bram Seeuws about Shared mobility The Rosseta stone for rural areas

Purpose: to maximize the ecological, social and economic benefits from car sharing

Key messages:

- 1) Carsharing: only in big cities
- 2) Roundtrip – Station-based; Home zone-based
One-way – Pool stations; Operational area
- 3) Mobihubs – Offline connected mobility, living without private car
- 4) Carsharing in smaller towns:
 - a. Key player: Local authority
 - b. Plan it
 - c. Start with sharing own fleet
 - d. Promote car sharing in general
 - e. Communication in different levels
- 5) Political support is very important.

Block 3: Looking ahead

Key messages for each topic:

- **Economic Dimension:** Flexibility and creativity, funding, equality, new actors, combine different services and using local resources are very important factors for mobility services. Ten years ahead: developed infrastructure, connection – everyone to everything, mobility is not only on land – it is in the air and on water too. Multimodality and digitalization.
- **Local Dimension:** Strong community – trust, shared values, involvement of locals in local activities. Need to identify leaders in communities – they communicate and create networks. Solutions must be flexible because they may change. Expectations are not wishes.
- **Social Dimension:** Flexibility of services, connection between services, rural development strategy and social interaction with other people are important.

Some take-aways:

- Lack of resources drives towards social exclusion. Transport is part of that.
- Flexibility in organizing services is needed; talk to each other; match services.
- A political strategy should be behind that (for example, rural development strategy)
- Service-to-people is better than nothing, but interaction between people is very important. Not to lose that.
- Strong community is where ties, trust, will and involvement is present. There should be resources and structure. Leader is possible to identify. Diversified demography.
- We need leaders to communicate initiatives. They are the energy.
- If we know where we are, we know where to go!
- Solutions should be flexible.
- Support from government is crucial.
- People less and less want to live in big cities. They want to live in rural areas but with good connections to big cities.

What's next?

In the future we need to think about cooperation in different levels – local and international. Also to think outside of the box, create innovations and combine services.

The next Rural Mobility seminar takes place in Vejle, Denmark on 21 February.