

17.9.2020 speech Merja Kyllönen

HOW CAN EU, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICIES SUPPORT RURAL MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY? AND ANSWER IS YES, THERE IS FUTURE FOR RURAL AREAS AND RURAL MOBILITY BUT WE HAVE TO DO IT TOGETHER!

Dear organizers of the event, dear participators to the various innovative MAMBA pilots and projects, in short: Dear believers in Rural Mobility Solutions and Rural Maas,

To begin with, I want to thank you ALL for the hard work, great work what you have done in MAMBA projects and also, I thank for the kind invitation and the opportunity to take part in this final MAMBA seminar. When the invitation was presented to me, the organizers made a request to go wild and blow your minds. It's not an easy challenge, usually talking about policies and legislation make people yawn. Waw waw waw, policies, who cares, give me more chocolate 😊 However, instead of wild tricks like standing on my head, I challenge YOU to do your best to stay well awake and alert throughout my speech! I promise you, understanding how system works and how we should operate, will help you to take MAMBA to daily life around EU.

I would like to begin my presentation on policies that support rural mobility and accessibility with an observation from Finland. My presentation is made from a legislator's perspective, so keep that in mind. However, as we all know, the need for smart mobility innovations and Rural Maas stems very much from the need for solutions that would increase socio-economic prosperity everywhere in Europe, where accelerating outward migration is a serious issue and among other things, it increases mobility poverty in sparsely populated areas and hits especially hard on the most vulnerable parts of our communities.

As a politician from sparsely populated area in Finland, I have tried to address this issue literally throughout my whole career. Unfortunately, until now, urbanization has been THE trend that gets the most attention and both private and public financing.

To be fair, smart transport solutions, such as urban Maas have great potential to solve the problem of transport related noise and poor city air quality by connecting new mobility options with existing public transport. If successful, these solutions will in time revolutionize city planning, make daily commuting sustainable and climate friendly AND it is also a good business opportunity for new businesses. And for these reasons also legislators and policy makers pay so much attention to urban mobility and rural mobility may seem to be mostly disregarded. So, how we can be “sexy enough” to bring up Rural mobility also into political negotiations and financing.

Time is right, because already due to technological development in IT with rapid leaps forward in AI(eiai), there were signs that people are thinking about their options in life. This was accelerated by what is happening with the ongoing epidemic and the consequent necessity to working remotely, citizens of the tensely populated areas started to evaluate their overall quality of life from a completely new perspective and question the need to live in crowded cities. And wham, suddenly the sparsely populated areas are experiencing a rise in queries for properties.

So, there is a hope for country living and we need to get prepared to offer the former city-dwellers what they need.

Knowing very well, what kind of misery and in some cases, outright discrimination the epidemic has caused, I really and truly wish this ray of light in terms of outward migration taking a turn back, did NOT happen this way, but nevertheless, for projects like MAMBA, this is the moment when after this final webinar, you all need to continue with your work and scale it up in order to reach new users and involve other municipalities, connect all the decision makers in all level, legislators in every country. In a way, what you are doing now, is a pilot for what needs may be ahead – and in any case, the positive outcomes and discovered best practices need to be promoted and put in regular use.

So, what we need is hard lobbying, speak, give info, open the possibilities, write a story about it, let’s sell it to commission, to council, to EU-parliament, to member states, municipalities, to politicians. And we need a good story, daily life fairytale, to show what you have done and what can be done If we make Rural areas and Rural mobility great again 😊

Us policy makers and legislators have a lot to do in this. Especially check all the legislation and change what need to be changed for make things happen, be the abler to make the things change. Of course, I must agree with the critics, we did lose the first momentum with rural mobility and rural Maas solutions. However, better late than never and even without the global epidemic, there is Climate change and the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions throughout our societies. Meaning also rural and scarcely populated areas. So, ladies and gentleman's what can we do?

Firstly, we develop, we negotiate and adopt policies, which are basically measured principles that guide decision making in order to receive rational outcomes. To simplify a little, the main tools to see that these policies are implemented, is legislation, granted that sometimes legislation seem to make our living a right pain, and financing. I can comfort, it has not always been intended to make your life a living hell, but sometimes it just goes like that, because we are humans, even we think sometimes we are not 😊

Legislation is aimed at ensuring safety and security for all; territorial, social and economic equality, fair competition between businesses and fair living and working conditions for all and so on. The overall goal is to advance territorial cohesion in the EU. It needs to be happened also in transport sector, but is it? NOUP, not enough at all and can member states do something? Of course, we can demand that to happen, and what we can do, we can demand that action from our politicians in every member state.

As for how EU policies can support rural mobility and accessibility – well, MAMBA-project with funding from European Regional Development Fund, which one of the main instruments for EU's cohesion policy, is one great example, how.

I already mentioned Climate Change, which has brought forward the need to regulate and guide our actions individually and universally and thus, urgently take measures to mitigate its effects, for example, by way of designating different forms of Green financing tools in order to help make designing alternatives more economically viable for all fields of economy, most urgently within energy, building and transport.

In any case, the total amount of money that is available for different expenditures EU wide, is decided annually in the EU Budget. It is regulated by the seven-year Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which aims at predicting the overall EU spending on a longer term. That means that we must be ready to operate with MFF too.

But what is important now, at this very moment and it is critical for MAMBA too. It is the recovery funding, new funding to build up Europe after covid2019 epidemic. What could be better idea than making new solutions for rural transport viable with a stimulus recovery financing project. Accessibility, equality, climate issues, new opportunities for people to live and participate are part of the European family's goals. This is new thinking, this is possibility to use our money smarter and save our planet too.

Of course, there are also several different EU-level financial instruments, from which Regional Policy is the most important and It is delivered through two main funds; European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund. And the reason why commission is so important to wake up, is of course the coming financing and projects which are straightly financed from there. (EU Commission Calls for Proposals.)

There would be a whole lot more to say about EU financial instruments and EU funding, but it would easily take the whole time that was allocated to me and you need definitely more chocolate, hope not alcohol yet 😊 to be able to listen, so I'll move on to national and regional policies and how they could support Rural – or any – mobility and accessibility policies.

Well, let me start by sharing my most disappointing observation and greatest cause of grey hair at the moment! The biggest obstacles of any kind of progress in the new mobility solutions and thus far, achieving low-carbon mobility solutions, are the national Treasuries, that is Ministries of Finance, who propose the national taxation policies, including all over the EU! So, where you have the biggest obstacles, it usually sings taxation, taxation, taxation. You can't do this, you can't do that, we support different things. SO, if you can change the thinking in Ministries of Finance, you can make the revolution. It is not easy case but go there and speak how we should use our taxpayer's money more effectively ja wisely. And show it with pictures and finance tables.

I have been actively involved in advocacy on behalf of Maas-solutions to be included within tax-free commute benefits in our next annual budget. Regarding mobility services, the Ministry of Finance does not have enough knowledge and understanding of the importance and potential of creating new mobility services to reduce CO2 emissions and strengthen smart spending throughout the local transport and services transport chain - not just one part.

I firmly believe that opening the whole public transport system (school transport, social and health service transport, elderly people transport, commuting and carpooling, public transport, private transport) without silos would make public transport not only a competitive alternative for passenger cars but would also open up a number of new prospects for rural Maas and equal development for all tax-funded public transport. We have huge goals and challenges with energy sector, climate issues and air quality so we urgently need this kind of changes in our policy. And if someone is still asking, when we need to do this, the answer is, NOW!

So, if you feel that this kind of problems can existing in your own country, check this out and be ready to act and change this.

You probably are thinking that these are harsh words. Yes, but it needed to be said, otherwise nobody would wake up and things that could potentially make a huge change, do not move forward. So, you can either throw me with a stone or give me more chocolate, but I will continue until I see the Maas and Rural Maas revolution go ahead around Europe. Or until the voters kick me out from all the legislative levels 😊

And the last words, which make you remember this Mamba meeting, and grazy woman from Finland who really want to make Maas revolution on both city and rural level.

First learn to Think,

then be ready to change your thinking

First learn to read info, learn to find info

Then understand it

Then share all the best parts and practices

Get to know what all costs

Who pay them?

Why, is it smart or not?

If not, be ready to find out why and be ready to change more.

And what we need is more people to believe

that the smart change is needed, and it is urgent

FOR the use of tax payer's money, our money, your money.

Love can change a lot, but money does it for most 😊

*And Hipi hop – remember recovery funding, now is the time to act, changes can be done.

*Check out the taxation and regulation/legislation case in your country/own area – what is enabling things to happen

*Wake up everyone, share info and best practices, be like bishop of Rural Maas in your own area.

*And when you get tired, go and buy good chocolate and little bottle of good whiskey and start everything again 😊