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JOINING FORCES TO INFLUENCE EMPLOYEES MOBILITY CHOICES: THE SASMOB ALLIANCE OF SZEGED

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Short Description

Looking for new ways to influence mobility behaviour, the city of Szeged initiated an alliance with major employers. This approach facilitates cooperation between businesses and the city, through which businesses receive tools to shape workplace mobility, and they can more efficiently contribute to the sustainable mobility goals of the city.

Main part

The city of Szeged has for long been a lighthouse of sustainable mobility in Hungary, recognised with the CIVITAS Legacy Award in 2018. Looking for new ways to influence mobility behaviour, the city started to deal with workplace mobility planning. Companies with mobility plans can now get exemptions from parking standards in the inner city, and new workplace areas are planned together with bicycle and public transport access.

With the aim to accelerate progress towards multimodal, inclusive mobility with a low environmental impact, the city initiated an alliance with major employers under the SASMOB UIA project. This approach sets up a regular cooperation between businesses and the city, through which businesses receive powerful tools to enable and facilitate sustainable commuting for their employees. The alliance initially covered 7 employers - public and private, from different sectors (industry, IT, education, health, public service), with different workforce and different locations - with a total of over 5000 employees, but it expands constantly.

Under the cooperation, each employer has nominated a mobility manager, and prepared a mobility plan based on extensive surveys. The comparative analysis of the survey results revealed some key findings on the impact of different factors (such as location, sector, parking and public transport supply, as well as workplace mobility policies) on workplace mobility. While the exact numbers will vary from city to city, the tendencies supported by data show the importance of the different factors.

The measures - responding to the needs of employees - range from small-scale infrastructure adjustments (e.g. bicycle parking facilities, bike repair workshops/points) to services (e.g. on-site PT pass sale) and awareness raising campaigns. An application has been also developed: its desktop module helps the mobility managers to create and publish surveys, set and monitor goals, while a mobile application for employees serves as motivation by tracking and gamification. Aggregated data serves as decision support for companies, and even for the city.

The expected result is a behaviour change of employees, in favour of sustainable modes, contributing to the reduction of energy consumption and CO2 emission, as well as to health benefits. A new round of surveys aims to measure these impacts. The alliance of the city and employers is open: more companies are continuously being approached and are joining this collaboration for better and more sustainable workplace mobility in Szeged.

What is new?

While workplace mobility planning is an established approach in many countries, it is still new in Hungary with sporadic low-scale examples. However, the really innovative aspect of the project is the city-initiated alliance of public and private stakeholders covering 7 employers and more than 5000 employees, which is unprecedented in Hungary and matches only a few existing initiatives in Europe and the USA.

What is transferable to other cities and regions?

The most important outcome of the project is that motivating companies to embark on workplace mobility planning is possible, even in a CEE country where it has no tradition. The key factors identified are the initiative by the city (also on the political level) which also enhances cooperation between businesses; and the overdemand on the labour market which encourages companies to spend on the wellbeing of their employees to reduce costly fluctuation. The analysis of survey results also reveals the impact of different factors on workplace mobility.

What are outcomes and conclusions?

The main target groups are 1) cities wanting to join forces with employers to influence workplace mobility in order to meet their sustainable mobility goals; 2) employers seeking a good relationship with the city where their site is located, as well as thriving for providing better working conditions for their employees through more seamless mobility; 3) and finally the residents of the city and its FUA who benefit from better mobility with lower negative impacts and consequently from higher quality of life.

Who are the main target groups?

Concerning the efficient implementation of diverse MaaS offers the definition of a game plan has to be established to bring stakeholders and city/users interests together. The dialogue involving district management, experts of city departments, cross-municipal cooperation, transport service providers, competence centres for future urban issues and research institutions is understood as an important factor to foster MaaS at the urban fringe. Other fundamental actor is the citizen, dialogs with citizens are important to understand the needs, fears and wishes of users and non-users tackling the main challenge of communicating MaaS offers to strengthen the position of MaaS as a good mobility solution.

And what now? - what will change? - what is the relevance for the future?

The COVID-19 epidemic obviously had a decisive impact on workplace mobility, which is closely monitored in the SASMOB partnership. Most of the office staff shifted to working from home: this was easy for the employers already allowing home office before the crisis (typically for one or two days a week), while others had to procure equipment, upgrade their networks and adapt their internal regulations. It also facilitated long-planned improvements towards paperless, digital processes, even in sectors where this was regarded overly challenging before. On the other hand, blue-collar workers still have to work on site, in some cases even more than before; in their case the employers support individual mobility (e.g. extension of company bike rental period or temporarily covering the costs of car commute). The city also provides a wide public transport supply to workplace areas, to allow for keeping distance, despite of the significant financial losses.

Based on interviews and a webinar with employers in Szeged, they do not plan to keep the level of home office applied during the lockdown, as it is challenging for most of the employees, and they also miss personal interaction. However, the improved processes will be preserved, and allowing one or two days of working from home per week is seen as realistic. The city thrives for a possibly quick recovery of public transport usage (together with the necessary safety measures), and asks for cooperation by the employers, as on the longer term efficient urban mobility is not possible without a strong public transport system.

Link to the project

sasmob-szeged.eu/en/