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THE LAST MILE PROJECT - IMPROVING FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS FOR FLEXIBLE LAST-MILE SOLUTIONS IN RURAL TOURIST REGIONS IN THE LONG TERM

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Short Description

The presentation highlights outcomes of the 4-year project LAST MILE (Interreg Europe, 2016-2020), in which 6 regional authorities in Europe had taken inspiration from each other in order to improve framework conditions for the realization of (touristic) flexible transport solutions in their regions. First improvements could already be implemented.

Main part

The advantages of a flexible transport service responding to the actual demand in terms of time and routing are obvious in areas with low population density in combination with a fluctuating tourism frequentation. Flexible services can considerably help closing the last-mile-gap acting as efficient basic mobility service or as feeder to the higher p.t.-network for both, locals and tourists. In practice, however, many attempts failed in the long run because initial funding ran out and the service is not financially sustainable. In other cases, the realization failed due to legal or institutional constraints.

Regional authorities participating in the LAST MILE project (AT, LU, SK, ES, BG, PL) wanted to improve unfavorable conditions for flexible small scale transport services so that regional players in transport and tourism have more security to initiate or join the development of such transport systems.

In a first phase (2016-2018), the regions learned from each other about their specific challenges but also about proven solutions. Regional authorities were accompanied in the interchange formats by other stakeholders from their region, so that multi-level learning was facilitated in a direct way. They found out, for example, how a hailed-shared taxi can be organized in a financially bearable way, how to ensure the involvement of the tourism branch in sustainable transport projects or how to develop projects despite of an unclear legal background.

Phase 1 ended with 6 regional action plans, in which the regional authorities committed to tighten their policy instruments having regard to a stronger positioning of flexible sustainable transport in the regional (investment) priorities (or at least speak up for an overhauling of national legal frameworks) or to directly make investments in regional transport infrastructure and mobility services.

The actions, the regions are implementing in the ongoing second phase (10/2018 “ 9/2020) and beyond, comprise on the one hand political ones, like the introduction of flexible transport as feeder to higher p.t. as concrete targets and investment priorities in regional development and funding programs; on the other hand supporting the inclusion of terms and definition related to flexible transport services in the legal frameworks for transportation.

Besides, regional governments inspired by the examined practice examples also directly jolt the realization of concrete tailor-made transport services, benefiting tourists and locals equally. The presentation will provide insights in the ambitious plans these regions have worked out and first achievements they already made in paving the way to flexible mobility systems within their regions.

What is new?

Action plans developed within the project, were really put in practice before the end of the project. Beside some direct investments in infrastructure and service (for which regional/national or other structural funds have been acquired), the actions involve strategic/political, legal or organizational improvements (e.g. embedding flexible transport in a regional strategy with investment priorities,

defining flexible transport in the national transport law for the first time or installing an inter-sectoral cooperation structure involving transport and tourism) that will ensure the positive effect of the project in the participating regions in the long run.

What is transferable to other cities and regions?

The conclusions from the analyses of favorable and hindering framework conditions for flexible transport systems can inspire other regions to assess their own case. Separate from hard frameworks (e.g. legal constraints), the (good) practice evaluation revealed lots of soft transferable elements in terms of organizational and operational aspects as well as financing structure or consumer information; thereunder on the one hand very practical examples (e.g. effects of a retrofit of pt-stops and busses with information boards and bike carriage facilities) and on the other hand institutional issues like a regional cooperation structure involving the transport and the tourism branch.

What are outcomes and conclusions?

The legal changes some regions have already realized (e.g. amendment in Slovakian transport law to enable co-financing of touristic shuttles on the basis of a public service) are remarkable achievements towards a long-term promotion of flexible transport. From ongoing regional funding programmes, certain amounts of funds could be already drawn to concrete investments to improve last-mile connections in the regions (leverage effect from Interreg-Europe to other ERDF-programmes). Moreover, the project laid foundations for a switch in the operational programmes' priorities for the benefit of sustainable mobility in rural areas to be rolled out in the next programming period (2020-2026).

Who are the main target groups?

Regional authorities mainly in rural tourism areas who want to push towards more attractive sustainable transport by facilitating the implementation of small scale flexible transport solutions in their region. Besides, other regional players that might be involved in the development of regional sustainable transport systems (transport operators, regional transport associations, municipalities, tourism associations, tourism service providers etc.) Managing Authorities regional funding programs who should have a vested interest in supporting tailor-made sustainable projects. Policy makers at regional and national level who could influence legal/institutional frameworks for public transport and in particular demand-responsive transport.

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

In view of current pandemic, with official restrictions in public life on the one hand and personal insecurity on the other hand, it will be all the more important in due time to campaign for a climatefriendly mobility. Last but not least, the climate crisis has not disappeared because of Covid-19, so the need for action is out of the question. After a while and respecting adequate safety measures of course, we need to bring people back to public transport and prevent them from getting used too much to their private car (again). Mobility management involving all target groups, thereunder tourism, must be high on each region's agenda. Especially rural tourism destinations need to continue to work on their public transport accessibility, in which the "last mile" still remains a major bottleneck, so that sustainable mobility becomes a real alternative.

Link to the project

www.interregeurope.eu/lastmile