Mobility management and collaborative planning: helping each other

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Summary

Historically, public participation in public policies has been weak in Spanish cities. However, in the last five years, an increasing number of municipalities are developing a more participatory approach, particularly in the field of urban mobility. In cities such as Barcelona, Donostia/San Sebastián or Granada, this has led to the formal signature of a “Charter of Principles” or “Mobility Agreement” between the local Government and many local associations (from Trade Unions or Political Parties to grass-root organisations), followed by an “Action Plan”. In some cases, where the local Government has not been able to reach such compromise, these local associations have succeeded in developing a set of proposals, which are being influential for the development of political programmes and day-to-day policies.

In all cases, mobility management elements are a key component of the Mobility Agreement and its subsequent Action Plan. This paper makes a twofold analysis:
- About the influence of these initiatives in local Governance, in the field of urban mobility, identifying to what extent decision-making processes are being reinforced by clearer definition of objectives, effective monitoring and formalised revision processes.
- About the role that mobility management measures play within transport policy packages, when participatory processes are put in place.

To this end, a revision has been made of mobility policies in several Spanish cities in the past 5 years: Barcelona, Donostia, Granada (all of them with a formal “Mobility Agreement”), Madrid, where a number of associations have been lobbying together in this area (Madrid), and Valencia, where the involvement of the public is quite limited, in spite of innovative policies put in place by the regional and local authorities.
The results suggest that the action of social movements does make a difference. Most local authorities give a disproportionate attention to expensive infrastructure investments compared to cheap, “soft” measures, whereas more participatory processes favour the development of more “incremental” approaches. On the other hand, while widening participation, public authorities are more compelled to formalise and make decision-making processes more transparent, to identify objectives, and to base their position and proposals on the grounds of objective data (indicators), thus improving local Governance.

The framework for analysis

Collaborative or participatory planning means not only that stakeholders, or the public are large, are given information and an opportunity to express their views at the decision making process (Innes, 2002). It also means that these views are taken as an essential element in the development of alternatives. Furthermore, participatory planning also means that stakeholders are offered a levelled playground, so that social movements and associations are given resources for technical assistance, which otherwise only some special interest groups could afford. It means also that a transparent, objective decision-making process follows the information stage. And last but not least, it means that those participating get a clear picture of how decisions are made, and to what extent they will be allowed to influence it.
Mobility is a field prone to collaborative planning, based on a fruitful, fluent dialog established among the 3 major agents: decision-makers (local politicians and senior officials), technicians, and citizens (figure B). However, in many cases the scene is rather dominated by centrifugal forces (Figure A) so that:

- Decision-makers have a biased vision of mobility problems, giving too much importance to the views of car users compared to other citizens. There is also an abandon of planning in favour of piece-meal approaches, trying to give "something" to each social or "interest" group: one new parking here, some km of bike lanes there…
- Technicians are increasingly enclosed in their area of expertise, focusing too much in solving partial problems, while losing perspective on the impact of their proposals on the city as a whole.
- Citizens, associations and social groups act as mere "customers" of local policies, trying to get immediate, short-term benefits, and avoiding a comprehensive analysis of their cities. In parallel, less better-off groups become invisible for mobility policies: children, the elderly, pedestrians…

These centrifugal forces increase mistrust among the three groups, further obstructing the development of a shared, long-term vision of urban mobility for the city, and making virtually impossible the implementation of innovative, radical measures (figure A). On the contrary, the obvious lack of improvement generates a futile competition among all actors in proposing disparate, concurrent and too often unsustainable new projects.

These negative trends are to be counteracted by setting a cooperative framework, based on a number of tools: the implementation of new mechanisms for communication and participation in public policies; to develop monitoring mechanisms, which can be used as an instrument for performance-driven governance; incentives and subsidies for collaborative efforts (extra funding, pilot programmes, etc), and revision, simplification and streamlining of technical approaches, making them more accesible to the general public.

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1 See for example the UITP survey in the mid 1990s: citizens proved to be much more in favour of measures to restrict car use than local politicians.
(Innes, 2002). This approach is emerging in some cities in Spain since the late 1990s (Sanz, 2002).

This new approach means that all three agents are taking a different role, characterised by:

- In the case of decision-makers, a clearer vision of the cities' future, usually linked to some kind of strategic, sustainability planning (Agenda 21, etc.), previously developed. Vigorous leadership (these processes are usually linked directly to the Mayor’s Office, rather than to the Mobility Counsellor), and a more participatory concept of local Governance are also present.

- In the case of technicians, there is, if not solid knowledge, at least keen professional interest in innovative policies and measures for improved mobility management, willingness to co-operate with other technical services outside the transport realm, and sheer interest in regular, formalised monitoring and assessment processes.

- From the side of citizens, there should be a pro-active attitude, usually initiated by an Agenda 21 or another local bottom-up initiative. The interest of citizens on mobility issues is indicated by the activity of NGOs focused on these issues. In many cases, these NGOs count with the support and assistance of technical advice thanks to the voluntary involvement of professionals.

To which extent these centrifugal or synergic forces are in action in our cities, and which is the result? This is the question that we try to answer through the examination of a number of experiences.

**Recent experience in Spanish cities**

Since 1998, a number of City Councils in Spain have attempted to develop a shared vision of urban mobility. Local leaders probably find a number of practical advantages in this approach:

- Measures could be less controversial if previously agreed with key local players.

- A package of measures, partially addressing the disparate demands from different groups could be easier to develop, if presented together.

- Build support for potentially controversial, radical measures.
A shared vision was developed and formally signed in Barcelona in July 1998: the “Mobility Agreement”. This initiative was soon followed by Donostia and Granada, and later (not always successfully) in Seville, Terrassa, Huelva or Burgos. In all cases, there are a number of common issues:

1. On the necessity of a Agreement:
   - There is a serious problem on urban mobility.
   - A number of radical, painful, long-term changes are necessary.
   - There are many stakeholders and agents involved.
   - Public’s behaviour is an essential element in any strategy.
   - This is a long-term issue, which should be maintained in their main guidelines beyond the political 4-year cycle.

2. On the diagnostic (the problems of mobility)
   - Moving from solving the “traffic problem” to a comprehensive approach (focusing on liveability, health, environment…).

3. On the guidelines for action
   - Making the city and its inhabitants and activities less car-dependent.
   - Avoid piece-meal approaches, as they encourage further car use.

4. On the need for radical measures
   - Adopt a clear action plan, focusing on pedestrians, bikes and public transport.

5. On the decision-making process (monitoring and participation).
   - Define a monitoring system, based on indicators.
   - Assign targets to these indicators.
   - Establish a formal assessment process, including participation.

The "Mobility Agreement" fancy was probably influence by the previous success of other participatory processes: Agenda 21, Strategic Planning and particular local projects (like Barcelona’s Forum 2004), in which local authorities try to get citizens involved. There seems to be an encouraging trend from public authorities to favour a consensual, educational strategy, instead of basing new sustainable mobility on restrictive measures (Elorza, 2003).
In Madrid, the process derailed due to the increasing disagreement on the purpose of the exercise between local politicians and social movement groups.

In the last years, transport planning practices in the city and in the metropolitan region had increasingly relied on a "political-influence model" (Innes, 2002), based on the completion of infrastructure projects selected by political leaders at the beginning of each 4-year term. As a reaction, social movements had been developing an increasingly defined, alternative vision on how regional and local mobility should be like. Not surprisingly, both models clashed almost since the first meeting convened by the City Council, and the dialog collapsed as social movements arrived at the certitude that local politicians were using those meetings merely to uncover to the public and the media already decided-upon, minor projects.

These conflictual planning styles have been described by Innes (2002), as a consequence of different requirements from two dimensions: interdependence of interests among players and diversity of views and objectives (Figure C). Each style is dominated by one agent, and is using a specific mechanism to get agreement from the other players.

In the case of Valencia, the "technical bureaucratic model" is probably dominant, well tuned with the objectives of political leaders. This approach focuses on the continuous improvement of (and investment in) the transport system, with little, if any, attention to
demand management. As a result, Valencia has developed an integrated transport system, with an extensive light rail network as its backbone.

Assessment

The development of Mobility Agreements in an increasing number of Spanish cities can be explained in the context of the slow emergence of a collaborative planning concept. This approach assumes that public agencies in charge of urban mobility have to deal with both, diversity (there are disparate objectives, stakeholders and views) and interdependence (there are strong links among stakeholders, so that it is not possible to satisfy them all, or to establish bilateral dialogs to solve each one’s problem): environmental interests cannot be addressed without dealing with highway interests. Transit policies cannot be successful without sensible land use policies… Decision-makers have led this path, with the support of some professionals, feeling that it would better serve their classical objectives of bringing objective results to their constituencies at the end of their term, in a context where these become increasingly sceptical about the purpose and effectiveness of infrastructure projects. Furthermore, decision-makers expect to get support to “painful” demand-management measures, which seem to be unavoidable, or to relieve some pressure for further spending in expensive infrastructure projects.

In the most positive cases, this approach is being successful in:

- Creating a more co-operative context among the 3 actors.
- Consolidating participation: NGOs active in the mobility area are blooming in several Spanish cities.
- Moving the focus of the discussion, from new infrastructure projects to long-term strategies (shyly)
- Creating an on-going public debate in mobility, increasingly followed by the media.
- Making technicians more interested in soft measures (demand for training).
- Refining the “sustainable mobility concept”.

However, it is also facing major difficulties:

- Participation may become a scapegoat for a "business as usual" attitude.
- Strain and pressure on rather weak associations.
- A danger to focus too much on small, minor measures, rather than strategies.
- Lack of communication between the mobility unit and other areas (particularly in the social sector) within the municipality's technical services.
- Results are modest compared to expectations, from all sides. There is a permanent risk to abandon the process.

Technicians are in a particularly difficult position: they have to review traditional, well-established practices, in some cases losing power (where technical planning was dominant) or comfort (where political influence was the model), and their precise role becomes blurred. For this reason, the implementation of a collaborative model should be coupled with a specific programme or strategy addressed to the city's technical services. Chances for failure in the process should not be disregarded, as they usually re-enforce centrifugal forces, as showed in the case of Madrid. Even if this outcome may be positive in reinforcing some stakeholders (particularly social movements), it seriously damages the prospects for dialog in the future, and the possibility of reaching long-term consensus on the vision for mobility in the city.

Conclusions

Blooming of "Mobility Agreements" in Spanish cities reflect the interest of the three major stakeholder of the transport planning process (politicians, technicians and citizens/social groups) to move together towards a collaborative planning paradigm. All these actors find it useful to undertake this approach:
- Politicians can move away from classical "planning by project and by funding", which is expensive, and has limited impact in terms of efficiency. They can also share the risk for taking unavoidable, radical demand. Management measures that may dislike part of their constituencies.
- Technicians are able to work in a more challenging environment, incorporating demand management measures as part of their expertise, and moving away from both, "frivolous" politically- driven practices and rigid, bureaucratic planning.
- Social movements find an opportunity to push their agendas and to build a more receptive environment to their traditional claims for comprehensive "regional-wide" planning.
The co-existence of traditional approaches (Valencia…) or failure in the dialog process (Madrid) show that business-as-usual practices remain strongly rooted in both, technicians and decision-makers. Furthermore, a number of interest groups (economic agents, transport sector, lobbyists, NGOs…) feel more comfortable within the traditional framework, so that a change in the planning paradigm seems to be feasible only when local politicians strongly feel the need to implement a demand-management driven approach.

To make progress in this direction, a number of initiatives have proved to be successful in certain cities: establishing a performance-driven governance style, where monitoring is a key tool; assigning resources and support to collaborative planning efforts, and simplifying technical procedures.

**Bibliography**


