Co-creating Urban Mobility in Neighbourhoods

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Cluster workshop of the SUNRISE, MUV, Cities4People and Metamorphosis projects

Round Table: Participation techniques & tools to engage citizens and co-create sustainable urban mobility solutions at the neighbourhood level.

1. TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS USED

Several different participation techniques & tools are being used by the projects, including co-creation workshops (broad range of specific methods and formats), serious games, interviews, simple questionnaires at the place of the intervention, field trips, school scans and thematic walks/scans/signalling (especially for minors and challenged users), public stands, open fora, cultural probes, focus groups, Delphi and YourPriorities.

In general lines, projects have opted for practical, hand-on tools rather than online and/or complicated tools. Some participants expressed the belief that online methods and tools are less effective than face-to-face. They serve though, in cases where physical accessibility is restricted. In any case, offline and online methods have to be in right balance.

The Sunrise consortium have performed a collection/mapping of such tools that are available as a public deliverable on the project website. This handbook includes about 40 tools for co-creation on mobility at the neighbourhood level, the best of which are mostly offline; market stands, walkshop (people with disabilities), future talks, design workshops, open forum (the only online).

2. KEY LEARNINGS: PLANNING THE EXCERSISE

The participation techniques and tools should be appropriately selected and combined to serve the purpose the co-creation stage and scope, the involved participants, as well as the desired outcomes. One step further, the appropriate mix of techniques and tools should be selected, in order to ensure equal access of all user groups to the co-creation process. This includes the mix of online/offline techniques at the same time, because many lack access to online tools.

Moreover, co-creation activities should try to incorporate diverse neighbourhoods and settings. This will ensure a deeper understanding and broader applicability of the results.

In any case, there should be clarity about the feasibility of the proposed capabilities of the methods and tools used. It is important to be honest about limitations. Do not be afraid to say 'no' when something cannot be done.

Methods and tools should be seen more as discussion prompts, rather than means to produce results.

The use of user-centered, anthropological approaches that include immersion in the natural environment and social events of the users, allowing for a substantial observation of attitudes, perceptions and challenges is very important. An empathic connection with the participants is important. Face-to-face relationships, one to one interviews and relaxed conversations make a difference. That said, most project teams prefer to go themselves to the natural environments of the participants and incorporate co-creation in the meetings of the communities. They just go where people are. Talk with their leaders. Walk around with inhabitants to listen the stories of people.

The downside of one-to-one interactions and the use of face-to-face methods and tools is cost. They require time and human resources, hence they are expensive. Some projects encountered challenges in getting enough personnel to moderate the workshops and administer the interviews on a voluntary basis.

It helps to bring in the media and keep them engaged. Bring in journalists, organise open meetings and group discussions where the media are invited.

Time is either an asset or a liability:
-   The participants should not be pressured, but instead given enough time to think about their input. We need to respect the learning curve of the participants and the social skills that they are developing during the co-creation process.
-   The right time for a co-creation activity should be chosen. For example, a Friday afternoon is better to a Monday morning.
-   In using the tools, it important to start early with time that will allow for trials. A test phase to see reactions is helpful. This way, if something does not work, there is time to try something new.
-   Online tools are especially time consuming. They should be active for a lot of time in order to collect enough input from participants.
-   Enough time should be foreseen to disseminate the events, implement the activities reaching an advanced degree of information depth, process the information and then draw proper conclusions.

Incorporate business and communication lessons from politicians and startups. Be organized, be professional, be communicative, use proper tools. Marketing (big mac) tools are really important to target people needs. You have to do it as politicians do when they have to gather votes, or companies do when they need to target new products.

3. KEY LEARNINGS: APPROPRIATE SETUP AND CONTENT

Pay attention to the finer details of the setup. It is important for the participants to feel valued. Secure a nice place for the co-creation to take place; select a time that fits their schedule; welcome them; give them food/drinks; follow up by letting them know the outcomes. In one of the projects, the selection of a popular pub next to the venue proved to be the perfect trigger an open discussion among municipality, citizens and stakeholders.

Choose one challenge to address at a time. Every co-creation instance should address an easy to comprehend, not strategic but rather hands-on issue. Do not address big expectations from entities that are very fragile (a mayor may change, corruption…). Only this way will the participants will have the ability to reflect, talk, and go deep into the essence of the topic. This will help achieve a certain depth of information, which is required to address a specific challenge.

Start from evidence. This evidence (data, flows….) will provide prompts and triggers for the participants to engage more quickly and substantially in the co-creation process. There are evidences that really trigger a reaction (i.e. % of space for car and kids). One of the projects successfully shared some pieces of such evidence in a guerrilla marketing way asking questions to citizens and it proved effective.

It is important to set achievable and not overly ambitious targets about the number of participants, the number of ideas and thoughts discussed, etc.

Use discussion topics that are important to them. The selection of an important and possibly sensitive topic for the community will attract interest and participation. Participatory budgeting, for example, attracted a lot of interest in one of the pilot cities of the projects.

A good trick is to get participants to discuss among them. This way the conversation carries on and the input is both richer and cross-fertilised.

Give people things to do. It is also important to see participants not as mere input providers, but to actually engage them in doing or producing something. They can also have some 'homework' to take away, as happened with children in one of the projects.

Visual tools are helpful. The use of maps, pins, pictures and pictograms (especially for children or disabled) are particularly helpful. Some projects have even chosen to adapt those maps and pictures according to the specific needs of each user group.

Don't overestimate or underestimate people's hard skills.

Use and take advantage of silent observation, especially during the prototyping activities. Silence is the best prompt; you can really listen the discussion of the participants. Listening to the participants as they speak with each other, it helps to understand what the conversations in their family and immediate environment are about.

Use methods and tools that involve the physical presence of the users at the place of intervention. It is helpful to visit the place of the intervention with the user, especially if they are mentally challenged or minor. Walk along with them around the physical place of the intervention. This will help them identify and communicate pain points on the spot.

In the co-creation activities of one project, it was chosen to start with stupid questions. It proved successful, as it let to the collection of a lot of keywords.

It is important to engage users both upwards (politicians, policy makers) and downwards (users). One can go up in the municipality departments and build coalitions.

Document who has participated (with names). Returning participants often do not remember the views/votes that they have contributed in previous co-creation activities of the same project. This process should be documented with transparency and made public, so that there are no doubts about the content. Documentation and transparency are also a way to protect the administrators of the co-creation exercise. It has to be designed in advance, on time.

A distinction between stakeholders and people/users is key.

4. KEY LEARNINGS: AFTER THE EXCERSISE

Come back with results. Field trips, focus groups, workshops in general have to have a follow-up.

Make the outputs publicly available in the form of open knowledge. This will sustain the interest of the participants and keep the public conversation ongoing.

5. CO-CREATION IN THE DOMAIN OF SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY AT NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL

Compared to other domains, co-creation can work better in the domain of sustainable mobility at neighbourhood level because it has an anthropological fundament. It addresses the human behind it. Mobility is about space and time: people take individual decisions on time, but space belongs to everyone and that's why co-creation can work better. It is not the car, but the driver that is affected by the decisions being taken in this domain. Hence personal beliefs, emotions and convenience interfere. More particularly:

- **The right to move and use public space is a very emotional issue.** Each and every one of us has the right to be mobile. Mobility is out there on the streets, on shared space for everyone.
- **The users have a high stake, they have something to lose and to sacrifice,** which is their usage and occupation of space in the way they want and in sequence the ability to plan their schedule according to their convenience.
- **Sustainable mobility at neighbourhood level has practical, daily life implications for all of us**. It touches everyone and have very important social implications. It defines our schedule and lifestyle.
- They affect the behaviours and touch the ethical aspects of usage of space.
- **It affects the cost of users for movement**.
- **Sustainable mobility at neighbourhood level brings together many stakeholders and hence provides a fruitful field for cooperation.** It is a zone where anyone can participate.
- **How we use public space and how we choose to move is also a form of a 'status symbol'.** Depending on how quickly, conveniently, costly, cleanly and freely we move in space, we perceive our social status and position ourselves in society. For example, people get very emotional about their "right" to use the car; the ownership of a private vehicle and the ability to park it exactly out of our homes is seen by many as a symbol of power and freedom.
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- **It is something that many people believe they have no significant power over, that they cannot change it.** They feel far from this decision-making process. Hence when they are given the opportunity to express their views, they really want to take advantage of it.

- One of the workshop participants noted that they believe that co-creation is equally important in all domains.