

Promoting Sustainable Mobility in Tourist Destinations: Mobility Center 2.0



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Abstract Over the past decades, leisure-related mobility in European regions has increased continuously, especially in tourist destinations. New mobility patterns put enormous strain on sustainability issues in tourist regions, which are particularly vulnerable in this regard since the amount of individual mobility often is higher than in non-tourist regions leading to road congestion, seasonal changes of transport demand causing capacity problems, and high level of private car use increasing the need for parking spaces, etc. The rising importance of ecological tourism demands new perspectives of the tourist destinations in establishing new sustainable mobility structures and strategies for supporting regional economic development. Mobility Centers 2.0 are an efficient tool to reduce individual car use and the negative impact of visitor's travel in tourist regions, as well as to upgrade the quality of the leisure offer and the external image of the region. They can help to strengthen tourist regions as growth poles and improve the economic vitality of the targeted destination.

Keywords Mobility center · Mobility management · Mobility behaviour · Multi-modal information · Accessibility · Sustainable tourism · Eco-tourism · Cooperation · Synergies

1 Introduction

“We are millennials and we are looking to have different travel experiences than our parents” says Patrick Quayle, Vice President for international planning at United Airlines.

According to Booking.com (2019), “over half (55%) of global travellers are being more determined to make sustainable travel choices than they were a year ago, but barriers include a lack of knowledge and available or appealing options when trying to put this into practice”. When it comes to in-destination experiences, over half

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(52%) of global travelers say they now alter behaviors to be more sustainable while traveling, such as walking, riding a bike, or hiking whenever possible.

Discount airlines and self-booking accommodation platforms have led to increased tourist flows in parallel with rising societal demand for more energy-efficient transportation. Such flows have created increased traffic congestion, less availability of public space due to increased demand for parking areas and higher use and circulation of private cars. The high motorization rate among tourists is a direct consequence of the lack of integrated public transport, tickets fit for visitors, insufficient provision of public transport connections to airports/harbors and leisure attractions (beaches, nature parks, golf courts, historic monuments, etc.), limited network perception, fragmented mobility information (which usually does not have the appropriate design and contents to ease usage), a lack of facilities and safety elements to ride bicycles or even walk in urban and interurban areas.

Changing demographics with an aging population put additional pressure on tourist destinations to create the proper precondition for the regions' future competitiveness, as the above-mentioned comfort requirements for tourists become more evident with age. The variability of touristic flows in terms of seasonality and space usage are in competition with the local resident supply of transportation and services, the local transport network and the local area demographic and social characteristics.

It is evident that inherent difficulty of small communities for the provision of integrated efficient transport services to residents and tourists often leads to higher individual car usage in order to compensate for the lack of appropriate mobility information and alternatives. Mobility Centers 2.0 are an efficient tool to reduce individual car use and the negative impact of visitor's travel in tourist regions, as well as to upgrade the quality of the leisure offer and the external image of the region. They can help to strengthen tourist regions as growth poles, which in turn improve the economic vitality of the targeted areas for both citizens and tourists, employees and employers, men and women.

2 Mobility Centers: A One-Stop Shop for Sustainable Mobility

Apart from the choice of transport mode to reach a tourist destination, the smart choice on-site plays a crucial role. Car rental businesses welcome the visitors already at the airport arrival halls and although a growing number of travelers become more and more aware of the necessity of sustainable, climate-friendly mobility, most of the tourist kilometers on-site are still done by car. In fact, the UN World Tourism Organisation (2008) states that climatically sustainable tourism requires fundamental shifts in consumer behaviour but the most probable explanation for the current mobility behaviour of tourists and visitors is the lack of information in unfamiliar settings.

Moreover, the still ongoing economic crisis and the growing trend of ecological tourism are demanding new integral strategies in a highly competitive field. Tourist

destinations require solid and sustainable mobility structures, which can effectively support regional economic growth, as well as the development of safe, livable, and attractive places for all.

This is, where a Mobility Center 2.0—tailor-made for tourist destinations—steps in, and can serve as an information hub for all issues related to sustainable mobility in a region. All over Europe, Mobility Centers serve as information platforms, shaped after a model of a one-stop shop and their core business is multi-modal mobility information and advice (Fig. 1). Mobility centers are service facilities that offer users and potential users of public transport, information and services on the subject of mobility across all modes of transport. Ideally, they are the contact point for all questions about mobility.

The core business of the mobility centers is, in addition to multi-operational timetable information and ticket sales, to advise customers. Organizational services such as vehicle rental, car sharing, the sale of accessories, or the disposition of flexible transportation modes are also offered. Apparently, linking mobility services with leisure, cultural, and tourist information is becoming increasingly important. Tourism and leisure mobility requires a high degree of information about alternatives to the car. Successful examples for linking tourist information and mobility services are, e.g., the mobility center “Mobilito”, Bischofshofen (AT), the “Mobicenter” Wuppertal (GER), or the “M.Punkt” in Wolfsburg (GER).

The special importance of the mobility center arises from the offer described above, combined with the simplicity of the system (one-stop shop) and the customer-friendly opening times. Through their work, mobility centers ensure that users of public transport feel very well looked after and are thus able to satisfy their mobility needs even without their own car. Especially in combination or cooperation with tourist information points, mobility centers can make a major contribution to the environmentally friendly handling of mobility needs in sensitive areas.

The Mobility centers which increasingly popped-up all over Europe differ significantly in terms of the range of services, external image, sponsorship, and financing. There are no specific networks and standards are usually not defined. This leads to a certain confusion of the offer and a lack of transparency for the user. Standardization, however, is to be seen as a prerequisite and is therefore essential, last but not least, to clearly communicate to the customer what services can be expected from a mobility center.

The minimum standards concern:

- Offers and work content
- Accessibility and opening times
- Personnel qualifications
- Equipment

The Mobility Center 2.0 expertise should at least cover:

- Information and advice on all modes of transport (public transport, on-demand services, e-mobility, walking, cycling)



Fig. 1 Mobility centers, established in the frame of SEE MMS project, 2012; South East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme

- Regional/national ticket sales for public transport, taking into account the entire service chain: information—advice—sales
- Advice on further alternatives to motorized vehicles
- Idea and complaint management
- Tourist information (guided tours, day-trips, landmarks) and ticket sales
- Organization or booking or information on demand-driven transports

The expansion stages of the mobility center relate to Mobility Management advice for schools or companies, cooperation with accommodation providers, the rental business, the implementation of a mobility shop, or even transport planning activities.

3 The Five Steps of Implementation

When implementing a Mobility Center, it is advisable to follow the five steps approach, as shown in Fig. 2:

Step 1: Involving all stakeholders from the start.

A diverse group of stakeholders has to be brought together for the implementation of a mobility center. Usually, transport operators, politicians, tourism institutions, residents, and lobby groups do not have a common view, which—on the other hand—is a pre-requisite for a tailor-made mobility center. The floor for successful implementation and long-term operation can be prepared through workshops and discussion rounds with key stakeholders, politicians, and all potentially involved people. This is where the foundation stone for the Mobility Center is laid and a tailor-made concept can jointly be developed, based on best practice in Europe. Besides the services to be



Fig. 2 The five steps of implementation of a mobility center

offered and the technical needs, also possible cooperations, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses should be investigated and discussed in a joint effort.

Step 2: Definition of tasks and services.

Mobility Centers offer information and service tasks for customers and represent customers' mobility interests. The target group includes all users of public transport, but also people who do not yet use public transport and who could be considered potential future customers. Other target groups, such as tourism, schools, and businesses, health organizations are increasingly being considered in tailor-made concepts. The following tasks and services are characteristic of Mobility Centers:

- General information on the transport network (routes, destinations, timetables, etc.)
- Route planning.
- Information on tickets and special offers.
- Ticket service (sales and/or reservation).
- Tourist Information.
- Information on car-sharing, car-pooling, e-mobility, and other regional offers.
- Bike rental.
- Information on bike rental (rental options available and/or tariffs).
- Information on pedestrian routes.
- Information on Park & Ride spaces.
- Complaints management.
- Additional services of a Mobility Center could include:
 - Individual marketing for public transport.
 - Project/event implementation.
 - Organization of tourist tours.
 - Planning and implementation of measures in the field of mobility management.
 - Transport coordination.
 - Traffic/urban planning, etc.

Step 3: Set-up of cooperations.

Creating alliances or setup collaborations is the best way to get public support for the Mobility Center and increases the chance of a successful implementation of the project. It is advisable to base the operation of a Mobility Center on several supporting pillars. A minimum standard requirement is the cooperation with transport companies, transport providers, and associations. Further possible cooperation partners are as follows:

- Tourist offices/municipalities
- Travel agencies and tour operators
- Local economy (e.g., shopping centers)
- Chambers of Commerce
- Employers' organizations
- Lobby groups (e.g., Cyclist Federations)

- Organizer of events and meetings
- Delivery or rental services, etc.

Step 4: The right location, equipment, and staff.

The location of a Mobility Center is crucial. It should be located in the city center or at a public transport hub to ensure the best possible presence and accessibility.

Another critical point in the implementation and organization of a Mobility Center is the personnel. Regarding personnel requirements, one can at least identify two different profiles, which are a manager on the policy level and the staff on the operational level. The task of mobility managers involves promoting the Mobility Center on the public and political levels. The mobility manager is in charge of the overall coordination, administration, team leading, and daily management of the information hub, as well as for the further development of the mobility center and the implementation of new mobility services. The staff's tasks on the operational level are provision of information by phone, in writing and personal, as well as advice regarding all issues of mobility and travel awareness, Europe-wide ticket sale, planning of trips, bike rental, CarSharing—advisory service, management of information material, regular participation in team meetings, and general office work.

The standard equipment in a Mobility Center should be up to date, professional, inviting, and customer friendly. Concerning the technical facilities, computer hardware and software, a modern telephone system, a high-speed internet access, e-mail, and fax should be available. In times of digitalization, its services should be accessible 24 h online via Internet.

In case of further requirements for the stage of expansion of the Mobility Center or in order to create higher customer satisfaction, there are almost no limitations. However, a more sophisticated offer is also connected with higher costs and should be considered carefully.

Step 5: Funding and long-term operation.

The financial means are always scarce. Therefore, it is very important to consider the financial aspects in a realistic way and look out for co-operations. With regard to the time perspective for financing mobility centers, a distinction can be made between the introduction stage and the stage of running the Mobility Center in the longer term:

(a) Investments and initial costs

Mobility Centers include the concept study, initial costs for the equipment (hardware, software, office equipment, mobile information facilities, etc.), training costs, and marketing (opening event).

(b) Running Costs

The running costs include the rent and running overhead expenses (maintenance, communication, office equipment), costs for service staff and management, IT costs (Software, etc.), IT maintenance, office equipment, telephone expenses,

office supplies, postal charges and marketing and costs for the conception and the production of information and publicity material as well as costs for advertisements and public awareness campaigns/publicity campaigns;

4 Cost/Benefit Analysis

In tourist regions, a Mobility Center has to take into account the seasonal and temporary needs of tourists and visitors. Those additional offers and services may lead to additional operational costs, but in fact, the combination of tourism and mobility provides valuable synergies, not only by building up on existing structures like, e.g., tourist information centers. Such synergies are immanent and can reduce the running costs, which are crucial for a long-term operation.

In terms of the cost/benefits, the traditional economic ROI evaluation methods are not found to be adequate for evaluating Mobility Centers based on a pure business enterprise selling goods and services. If these methods are used, it may not be possible to prove that the Mobility Center is “a profitable company”. On the other hand, the cost/benefit analysis should be used to evaluate the Mobility Center as a “public service provider” and to consider the quantification and monetization of the social benefit in a more complex way.

An action-theoretical model for the choice of means of transport using the example of the mobility center in Graz (Weiss, 2004) analyzed the benefits of MOBIL ZENTRAL—the 1st Austrian Mobility Center in Graz, with a sample of 230 people, reliably proved the monetary advantages for the Styrian transport association (from the increased sale of tickets) after using the offers of the Graz Mobility Center. This advantage was put at 459.984 Euros through additional ticket sales per year and an overall change in behaviour, which would not have been realized without the work of the Mobility Center.

Other, rather social benefits (e.g., less noise, less road accidents, higher property values, etc.) were not included in this analysis. Also, it has to be taken into consideration, that the commitment to sustainable mobility in tourism, addresses a continuously growing group of tourists that is willing to travel the region sustainably. This results in growing numbers of overnight stays has the potential to boost the local and regional economy, and should be further analyzed.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The role of sustainable transport and mobility in the development of sustainable tourism is increasing, as leisure-time traffic is on the rise, and contributes considerably to greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and climate change (DestiNet Services, 2019).

While arrival, accommodation and departure can be easily planned and booked via online platforms, the information to cover on-site needs and preferences of tourists and visitors, e.g., distribution in time and space, comfort requirements (carrying luggage, families with children, etc.), familiarity with the region's transport network, number of persons traveling together, purchasing power, language barriers, and special mobility information requirements, etc., is not covered online. The lack of multimodal on-site information is one of the main obstacles for tourists and visitors too, when trying to put their wish for sustainable leisure trips into practice.

Mobility centers providing high-quality information and advisory services on environmentally friendly on-site mobility, as well as promoting environmentally-friendly packages are an efficient tool to change the traveler's point of view on a destination and can create a competitive advantage for tourist regions.

A main barrier in the implementation and long-term operation of mobility centers is the financing. Since the cost/benefit analysis in the traditional economic sense may not be applicable, the Mobility Center should be seen as a "public service provider" and the financial basis should include as many financing bodies as feasible. Particularly, in regions with high unemployment or a lack of alternative income, it may appear politically justified to use public funds in a way that people are kept in work or are given additional work. An alternative option to secure the operation of a mobility center is to tie it to existing regional-local structures and to integrate it into an overall organizational context.

One important success factor is that the service of mobility center for car-free tourism is communicated under the sustainability aspect, and should thereby focus on the additional benefits of car-free holidays and the additional relaxation that comes along with it. Sustainability as a unique selling proposition cannot create the product value that is worth buying.

If tourists or visitors are able to perceive the personal benefit of a car-free holiday, the journey is already booked and the indirect profitability inevitably will lead to economic success for the tourist region.

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