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# WEST ATHENS AND MÉRIDA FOCUS ON SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY PLANNING

Through their partnership, West Athens and Mérida are establishing a strategic approach to developing effective Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs), as well as finding ways to better involve societal stakeholders in the implementation process.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of their IUC cooperation, the West Athens planning authority, ASDA, is collaborating with the City of Mérida's planning authority, IMPLAN, to develop effective sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMPs).

West Athens is located on the western side of the Attica metropolitan area in Greece, while partner city Mérida is the capital of the Mexican state of Yucatán.

Through the IUC programme, Mérida hopes to gain ideas regarding social participation in sustainable urban mobility planning, while West Athens is looking for solutions to improve the methodology and implementation strategies of their SUMP.

Both cities agree that a major influence on

whether or not societal stakeholders will engage in the development of a SUMP is the dissemination of thorough, accurate, and detailed information.

This information should not be limited to the technical features of the project, but rather should comprise a full overview, taking into account the concerns of all stakeholders.

Mérida and West Athens have formalised their collaboration through a Memorandum of Understanding, which has been signed by both cities.

Going forward, the two cities aim to expand their collaboration scope to additional areas of interest, maintaining and fostering cultural and economic links.



## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

West Athens' planning authority, ASDA, is the inter-municipal authority in charge of all planning activities and processes at the sub-metropolitan level. In 2015, ASDA prepared a multi-faceted plan, titled *West Athens Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan [SUMP]*, which proposes 10 measures to resolve the main mobility challenges and problems of the area.

ASDA has acknowledged the need to find appropriate tools and techniques to enhance and improve public participation on a variety of municipal issues.

“ From Mérida, ASDA expects ideas and solutions regarding the critical issues of social participation in sustainable urban mobility planning, while from ASDA, Mérida expects ideas and solutions to improve the methodology and the implementation strategy for their SUMP ”

The main aims of ASDA's work are to:

- Build-up a task-force of key stakeholders and agree responsibilities
- Develop implementation strategies
- Define the roles of key stakeholders within the decision making process
- Identify, negotiate and implement financing schemes for SUMP projects

The implementation strategy for the existing SUMP for West Athens addresses issues such as legislation, financing, timing, organisation, management, control and evaluation.

The active involvement of societal stakeholders and citizens within the SUMP process in political, institutional and financial terms is greatly desired.

One risk factor is that as society is unused to active involvement at the municipal level, and is unaware of how to effectively get involved, it may hinder social participation.

Mérida's *Municipal Master Plan for Sustainable Urban Mobility (2015)* established four strategic

axes: communication for strengthening urban mobility culture, specialised studies for elaborating urban mobility projects, urban management regarding the implementation of projects, and a review of laws and norms



to strengthen the legal framework. The main objectives of Mérida's work related to SUMP are:

- Learn from West Athens' experience in elaborating a SUMP
- Strengthen local capacity for urban mobility planning
- Establish a SUMP Task Force
- Design and implement a pilot project

Mérida's strategy for elaborating their SUMP relies on IMPLAN's technical capacity, uses the established European Commission mobility planning methodology, and involves key stakeholders in an open participatory process. It also establishes evaluation and adjustment mechanisms.

The primary risk factor stems from the transport and commerce sectors, who may oppose the strategies and proposals contained in the SUMP.

From Mérida, ASDA hopes to gain ideas and solutions regarding social participation in sustainable urban mobility planning.

From ASDA, Mérida hopes to receive ideas and solutions to improve the methodology and the implementation strategies of the SUMP, based on West Athens' experience.



## RESULTS AND IMPACT

The activities undertaken in the course of the IUC programme have included two study visits (one in Mérida and one in West Athens).

Frequent online exchange, such as the electronic exchange of documents, webinars, and teleconferences, is also carried out. In practice, each of the cities acts as a specialised consultant to their partner.

To achieve its objectives, IMPLAN strengthened its planning capacities by setting-up a group of experts to help develop a SUMP. This included summoning key stakeholders to participate in the process and convening international and national consultants to guide different stages of the work.

As a result, Mérida's SUMP offers a vision that has been agreed by the vast majority of participants. These democratic participatory processes have led to strong citizen and political support. The SUMP effectively establishes strategies for implementation and proposes strategic projects to make mobility flows more sustainable.

The suggestions and ideas provided to West Athens by Mérida were based mostly on urban planning projects and urban operations; the clear understanding of the Meridian context in geographical, historical, social and economic terms has been of great help for West Athens.

During the collaboration, it was clear that the main factor that determines whether societal stakeholders will be motivated to engage in the development of the sustainable urban mobility plan is the provision and dissemination of thorough, accurate, and detailed information.

This information should not be limited to the technical features of the project in question, but should comprise the full overview of the project, addressing the concerns of targeted stakeholders.

Providing this information to stakeholders should be considered a vital component of the "SUMP Cycle".

Awareness campaigns may take different forms, such as television and web-based information spots, group discussions involving representatives of the targeted stakeholders, round-tables with renowned experts, and so on.

A more permanent structure, such as assigned representatives that can maintain contact with the primary stakeholders, is a good way to ensure continued acceptance of the process.

Through the collaboration, West Athens expects to formalise social participation in the SUMP implementation process and increase the rate of acceptance of the main SUMP measures among societal stakeholders.

Mérida has strengthened cross-departmental collaboration and social participation in terms of mobility planning and hopes to implement pilot urban mobility projects.



## LESSONS LEARNED



The representatives of each city were given the opportunity to interact with urban mobility stakeholders from their partner city, resulting in meaningful insights and a greater understanding of the issues faced.



SUMPs must aim to meet the demand for urban mobility whilst improving quality of life. To be successful, SUMPs should be developed across different policy areas and sectors, in cooperation with different levels of government and administration, and in conjunction with citizens and other stakeholders.



Social participation is a vital component of SUMPs. Social participation can take many forms, from consultative means, such as polls, which gauge whether mobility projects have sufficient acceptance levels from the public, to pro-active processes, such as crowd-funding, which include awareness campaigns and events.



SUMPs must take into account all modes of urban transport, identifying how they could best be integrated. User behaviour and the opportunities offered by new technologies should also be considered. In short, they should address connectivity, accessibility, efficiency, feasibility and sustainability to meet the mobility needs of citizens and industry.



Pro-active involvement requires a robust and reliable evaluation of mobility projects in terms of social financing. Financing a project through social processes may be complemented by traditional means, such as banking loans, etc. It is likely that social funding, even at a minor level, can act as a supplement for traditional private fund raising.



## THE IUC PROGRAMME

The International Urban Cooperation (IUC) programme enables cities in different global regions to link up and share solutions to common problems. It is part of a long-term strategy by the European Union to foster sustainable urban development in cooperation with the public and private sectors, as well as representatives of research and innovation, community groups and citizens. Through engaging in the IUC, cities will have the chance to share and exchange knowledge with their international

counterparts, building a greener, more prosperous future. The IUC programme is an opportunity for local governments to learn from each other, set ambitious targets, forge lasting partnerships, test new solutions, and boost their city's international profile. Its activities will support the achievement of policy objectives as well as major international agreements on urban development and climate change, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement.



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