

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING TO REDESIGN A CENTRAL AXIS

Thessaloniki, Greece

By REMEDIO project

KEY FEATURES

Main Objectives

- Reduce illegal car parking Improve the environmental conditions and the pedestrian comfort
- Improve intermodal transports and the coordination among the different road functioning
- Coordinate the different phases of urban planning through the Integrated Mobility Tool
- Increase quality of life by decreasing environmental impacts and promoting participatory governance

Challenges

- Lack of an intermodal transport perspective
- Planning an integrated redesign of a main road axis of Thessaloniki
- Possible disconnection between the phases of analysis, participation and urban design.

Investment/Maintenance Costs

- Staff costs of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki € 80,000
- Traffic experts staff costs: € 50,000

Impacts & Results

- The simulation has paved the way to redesign the city's central road
- Participatory governance to redesign a principal axis is key to improve the quality of life not only for the people who live there, but also for those who work and spend time in the area.





CONTEXT

As part of the REMEDIO project, a participative process has been developed in order to face the urban redesign of one of the principal roads of Thessaloniki, following the general SUMP concepts.

In Thessaloniki, the redesign of an important urban road axis of the city which faces congestion issues was proposed. The vision and objectives were developed thanks to public consultation to record stakeholders' and citizens' opinions and technical processing with relevant experts. The active involvement of stakeholders in planning helped create ownership on the final solution.

REMEDIO PROJECT DESCRIPTION

High-density areas surrounding the city centres with commercial and directional roads often suffer from traffic jams. Beyond pollution, there are several consequences associated with traffic congestion, like the risk of becoming a wound in the city connectivity system, or a factor of additional economic crisis and even social exclusion.

The main objective of the project was to strengthen the capacity of cities to use low carbon transport systems and include them in their urban plans by testing existing mobility solutions, through an assessment tool, called the Integrated Modelling Tool. The IMT is a multi-thematic modelling suite, designed to test and evaluate the effectiveness of soft actions (mobility solutions), and participatory governance schemes.

The main project outputs have been:

- (a) The creation of an Integrated Modelling Tool (IMT) for low carbon mobility solutions assessment
- (b) To set a new participative governance model for roads, based on the "horizontal condominium" concept, an innovative model of participatory governance based on sharing a common vision together with the main stakeholders
- (c) To pilot mobility measures
- (d) Develop awareness and educational paths on sustainable urban mobility behaviour.



HEAR THE PIONEER CITY'S VOICE

Technical researchers from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, urban planning experts, local associations of the civil society and citizens have worked together to redesign one of the main central axis of the city (Ethnikis Antistaseos, Vasilissis Olgas, Vasileos Georgiou and Manoli Andronikou Streets, 6.2 km long, passing through two Municipalities, namely Thessaloniki and Kalamaria). The pilot axis is also a road with mixed uses with important commercial activity and tall buildings all along the axis crossing a high-density residential area.

The intervention has seen the participation of urban planning experts from the Municipality offices, together with the Major Development Agency Thessaloniki S.A. (former Metropolitan Development Agency of Thessaloniki S.A.), who took into account the functionality of the road axis while addressing sensitive societal aspects such as people with disabilities and liveability of the street, and yet with a focus on aesthetics (the redesign should address not only the ground street itself but also the other levels of the building façades).

Beyond redesigning the road, the Major Development Agency Thessaloniki is reconsidering the last-mile transport and handling of goods, the road safety issues and the problem of illegal parking (such a common issue along the axis especially at peak hours). The redesign has taken the form of a study and visual concept, but it has not yet been implemented. The plan is linked also to the forthcoming opening of the subway and the definition of the city SUMP. A MoU has been signed between the Greek project partners, local authorities and important stakeholders involved in the redesign of the road axis in an effort to actively proceed in finding the required sources of funding.

The deployment of this pilot action is backed by the REMEDIO methodology that focuses on enhancing the participatory process and on highlighting, through the use of the Integrated Modelling Tool (IMT), the social and environmental benefits that the solution of the road axis redesign can bring.

Concerning the participatory process, lots of efforts have been put on involving different types of people, not only with seminars and open events to inform them on the upcoming project for the city, but also with group studies, interviews and online surveys. For example, five possible scenarios of the road axis redesign were presented for public vote; the one



which reached the highest score is the one which will be implemented whenever resources are made available. Because the pilot action concerns a very important axis of the city, connecting the city centre to its suburbs and the airport, stakeholders' involvement was achieved with no major difficulties. An additional MoU has been signed with social parties, citizen groups, NGOs.

The IMT has been applied to evaluate impacts of traffic scenarios as following:

- Reduction by 10% of the passenger cars and motorcycles traffic flow on the axis associated with the road axis redesign, or
- Reduction by 20% of the passenger cars and motorcycles traffic flow on the axis associated with the road axis redesign, while increasing public transport service, and
- Reduction of 1-hour time slot for freight distribution as a result of the regulated timetable of freight transport.

The integrated data analysis gave as a result (for each of the previous, compared to the current situation) the impacts data in terms of:

- Traffic fuel consumption
- Traffic noise
- Traffic pollutant emissions and carbon footprint
- Traffic pollution
- Public health (linked to critical respiratory and cardiac health problems, estimates on hospitalization and cure resulting in estimated reduction of social health costs).

Major issues encountered

- When working with different categories of stakeholders and groups of people, it can be challenging to make them all agree on some specific topics, where self-interest or strongly rooted behaviour tend to create conflicts and blur social convenience. This was the case when addressing the issue of illegal parking along the road, during the redesign of the axis. Business owners feared losing clients, citizens saw difficulties in reaching the services they need because of denied parking or fines. A good planning takes in consideration all these concerns, while showing the “big picture” of an integrated approach: the proposed solution generates one or more immediate



effects, but also triggers a series of further changes and consequences that will tend to influence people's behaviour. In this specific case, parking spaces are being removed from critical spots, some others will be guaranteed but better managed. As a result, public transport and traffic flow will improve. The implication is that buses will be on time and their trips could become more frequent. In addition, the redevelopment of the road axis should also include bike lanes, and wider sidewalks. So different options of sustainable mobility are offered to people, whose habits can change for good.

- The use of the IMT requires accuracy and the instrument could look demanding, yet it is not difficult to use, since technical staff working in municipalities and eager to use it, can be guided in how the tool works and how input and output data are used. What can be an issue, however, is to get specific data, especially the ones related to public health. If a Municipality is really committed, though, these data can be accessed and used.

Investment/maintenance costs

The staff costs of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki for the application of IMT in order to perform the environmental assessment of the redesign of the road axis in Thessaloniki (including IMT use for the base case, 2 traffic scenarios associated with the redesign, 1 traffic scenario related with the regulated timetable of freight transport) was about to € 80,000. There has been efforts also by traffic experts, quantifiable to € 50,000 approximately.

If Aristotle University of Thessaloniki should transfer the similar effort in another area, given the acquired know-how, the costs could roughly be reduced by about 50%. Simpler mobility solutions (IMT provides a lot of options) associated with the environmental assessment of less traffic scenarios could potentially cost less. Yet, it is important to know a license is needed for one of the IMT modules. The license cost, or an extension of it, should be verified in case of interest.

Positive side effects and continuity of the measure

The IMT is a successful integrated instrument that gives evidence of the environmental impacts that a mobility solution can have. It has awakened the interest of the local public authorities, willing also to use the same approach and instrument on other road axis of the



city that need requalification. So now the main challenge is to find funding for the agreed solutions to be implemented.

Since the IMT data elaboration works with the use of a third-parties software whose licence has been bought by the project but will expire in 2 years, it is necessary to secure investments to keep it working (not a major cost).

Key actors and stakeholder to involve

One of the main aims of the REMEDIO project was to enhance the participatory governance at its most, actively engaging institutions, citizens and other stakeholders' groups with which the municipality directly interacts to improve multi-modal and low carbon mobility, freight logistic and environmental quality.

The key actors and stakeholders to involve are territorial authorities, policy makers, scientific experts, public transport authorities, private and alternative transport associations, commercial associations and the public.

The right to participate in a society's decision-making processes can help achieve other primary goals: participation can help to deepen democracy, strengthen social capital, facilitate efficiency and sustained growth, and promote pro-poor initiatives, equity and social justice. Furthermore, involvement encourages all stakeholders to take ownership and acceptance of sustainable mobility solutions.