

Foreign Voices



No. 3
December 2011

Achieving sustainable mobility: psychology and policies

Sustainable mobility is one of the topics that many cities in the world want to achieve and have promised to deliver, but there are two main problems: the first of these is the definition that each city has provided of sustainable mobility (which in many cases is far from what it should be), and the second is that cities do not combine their policies with measures to generate awareness or change behaviour towards sustainable mobility. I will describe the first of these issues briefly and then provide more details on the second issue.

Carlosfelipe Pardo

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Bogotá

„People change their behaviour mainly because they see it as something which has direct and personal consequences (...). Messages that are oriented towards people using sustainable transport must have affective characteristics.“



Defining sustainable mobility

Cities and their policymakers have understood sustainable mobility rather broadly, with ideas ranging from electric mobility to charging for road use or subsidising public transport. In truth, sustainable mobility can be everything and nothing until it is created as a complete package of measures. These should include at least:

- Adequate institutional arrangements to support sustainable mobility measures;
- Clear priority of pedestrians, bicycles and public transport over private motorised transport in terms of infrastructure provision, regulations and pricing;
- Clear policies of promotion of non motorised transport in terms of infrastructure development and removal of barriers to use;
- Comprehensive policies in promoting public transport including operational arrangements, integration of fares and provision of adequate infrastructure and vehicles;
- Policies oriented towards rationalisation of car use via fuel pricing, parking pricing and supply management, road use charges and other measures which reflect real costs of car use.

As announced above, many policymakers understand sustainable mobility differently, or promote and implement only one of these policies or measures without thinking of mobility as a whole. In the worst case scenario, cities implement restricted versions of the above measures, but “complement” them wrongly with opposite versions of other options (for example, building cycleways while reducing costs for parking would be a contradictory set of measures).

Some basic rules of “psychology of transport”

It is not valid to describe the measures below as the psychology of transport, as this term encompasses various theoretical backgrounds, views and objectives. Rather, below are four “measures and rules” which are directly related to generating awareness in people and changing their behaviour towards sustainable mobility (i.e. using sustainable mobility modes and accepting measures).

These are the following:

1. Do not promote sustainable mobility through global warming

Global warming, though important and relevant, is not the best way to change a daily behaviour in a city. This is due to the fact that people do not see the consequences of their actions as directly related to global warming, and do not understand that “everybody counts” when producing the effects of global warming. Thus, asking someone to ride a bicycle to mitigate climate change will not produce fruits in the general population and should not be used as a principal strategy to achieve behaviour change.

2. Use self-referenced information to change behaviour

People change their behaviour mainly because they see it as something which has direct and personal consequences. Thus, someone who sees that other options of moving in the city (i.e. using public transport) generate less costs, imply investing less time and gives them a better chance to reflect, read and sleep, they will find it more attractive to use and will change their behaviour.

3. Provide affective relevance to messages

Messages that are oriented towards people using sustainable transport must have affective characteristics. This is difficult to define, but in essence people must know that the message that is being transmitted implies feeling better, or produces greater well-being, even reminding them of joyful experiences. Riding a bicycle is generally seen as one of these experiences when properly presented, though public transport is more difficult to promote with these characteristics but it should anyway be taken into account.

4. Give people the chance to use sustainable mobility

Many people have not walked, used public transport or reduced their use of cars because they haven't had the chance to experience sustainable mobility in an appropriate setting. Thus, giving people free rides on new public transport lines, taking them on bicycle rides (e.g. to their workplace and back with a guide) and providing them with useful information to get around the city walking will "open their minds" to sustainable mobility and will increase the chance that they use it while changing their point of view towards those modes of transport.

5. Complement it with proper policies

Trying to change behaviour towards sustainable mobility is totally useless if sound policies are not in place. If institutions are not well organised, public transport is of bad quality in service, infrastructure for bicycles is dangerous and sidewalks are not properly designed, and/or costs for using cars are very low, the probability of having people change their behaviour towards sustainable mobility is almost zero.

Conclusion

In essence, sustainable mobility can be achieved in any city in the world in a relatively short time frame because the technical information that is needed is there, and the tools that must be implemented are also known. To complement them and to secure their sustainability, public awareness measures geared towards behaviour change must be implemented. And to achieve such behaviour change towards the use of sustainable mobility, one must concentrate on measures that are self-referenced, with an affective weight, and one must have activities and measures that enable citizens to use sustainable mobility easily. With all these policies and measures in place, a city can quickly become a world-example of sustainable mobility.

More information on these issues are available from www.sutp.org which contains various documents in English, Spanish, Chinese and other languages.

Imprint

The **Development and Peace Foundation** is a cross-party, non-profit-making organisation which was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. More information is available under: www.sef-bonn.org

Development and Peace Foundation
(Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden - SEF)
Dechenstrasse 2
D-53115 Bonn

Phone: +49/(0)228/95925-0
Fax: +49/(0)228/95925-99
Email: sef@sef-bonn.org

Bonn, December 2011

ISSN: 1862-3913