

# SOCIAL INNOVATION IN MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT

This article is based on research of the work package on social innovation in mobility and transport of the EU-funded SI-DRIVE project and highlights the most important findings. A detailed elaboration of social innovations in mobility and transport are discussed in the final report of the working package [1].

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## INTRODUCTION

Social innovation initiatives for alternative mobility flourish. Surely, the most prominent example is car sharing, which is diffusing all over the world in diverse forms. However, there are many more ideas around: walking school busses, citizen initiated public transport, the critical mass movement, car-sharing, etc. Some of these are well known, while others are not. Within the work package “social innovation in mobility and transport” of the EU-funded SI-DRIVE project, we grouped these different solutions into three clusters (see figure on practice fields). The clusters are characterised by similar practice fields of social innovation, understood as more general focus areas, or bundles, of social innovation initiatives.

The cluster on green mobility and transport includes practice fields of social innovation fostering co-modality, e.g. through sharing initiatives implementing new practices related to usership rather than ownership. It also includes social innovation facilitating the use of electric mobility and multi-modality, i.e. the use of different transport modes on the same trip.

Many social innovation initiatives are based on slow transportation. There are no instances of striving for high-speed transport or long-distance trips. Instead, projects use walking or cycling as their starting point and strive to integrate them into daily activities. As a consequence, slow mobility has a strong local emphasis.

There is also a considerable inclusiveness/access dimension assigned to social innovation in mobility and transport to establish or increase access to basic needs fulfilment and societal life. These practice fields address the needs of people with reduced mobility, address new transport possibilities realised by citizen initiated public transport, gender sensitive transportation, etc.

The commonality among all these practice fields is engagement of actors different from those of the traditional mobility and transport system. The motivation of actors within these initiatives is to realise their idea of innovative mobility and to address the social problems of the immediate or wider environment by offering mobility solutions. Little is known about these initiatives in terms of actor constellations and roles, drivers and barriers, and the dynamics related to the innovation process. Based on this background, this article aims to characterise the initiatives as they relate to involved actors and financing, and to draw conclusions for policy making.

## SPECIFICS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION IN MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT

Quantitative data of 128 social innovation initiatives in mobility and transport were compared against data of 877 social innovation initiatives in other SI-DRIVE policy fields. Accordingly, four major distinctions were found to characterise the social innovation initiatives in mobility: the initiatives often have strong economic relevance; a volunteer workforce is still a crucial asset; policy plays an influential role as a driver; and technology is a central complementary factor. This is summarised in the following [1] [2].

**Economic relevance.** The initiatives include a strong economic dimension. The most commonly engaged actors are public bodies, private companies, and NGOs (see figure on the economic relevance). Different mobility icons have been used throughout the figures of this article to underline the variety of mobility and transportation initiatives). Many of these actors have not been involved professionally in the mobility and transport system before. Private companies are especially actively engaged in mobility and transport initiatives as compared to all other cases studied in SI-DRIVE (47% against 45% and 42% against 36%). There is economic interest for example in many car and bike sharing initiatives, but many

companies are also engaged in smart working and smart commuting approaches as part of their corporate social responsibility strategies. Another difference is the low engagement of NGOs compared to all the other studied SI-DRIVE cases (29% against 49%). Economic return from own investments is the most important financial source, directly followed by national public funding and own contributions from members of the initiatives. Philanthropic capital, foundations, and different kinds of donations play only a marginal role in financing mobility and transport initiatives, which is a striking difference to the other SI-DRIVE cases.

However, **volunteers** play a crucial role in mobility and transport initiatives and the average number of volunteers involved in mobility and transport initiatives is much higher than in the other policy fields [3]. The reason is globally distributed networks of people engaged voluntarily in specific initiatives.

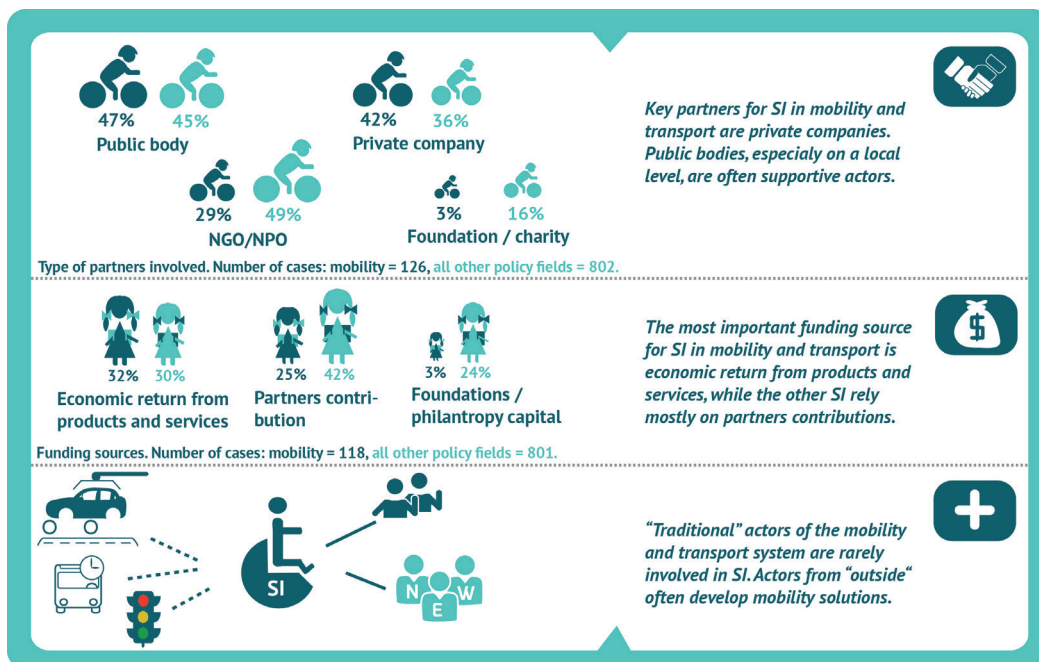
**Importance of politics.** Political strategies are a driver in 24% of the mobility initiatives, compared to only 6% in all other cases. Especially in the implementation phase, actors of the initiatives often interact with public bodies. Nevertheless, there are differences between the political levels (see figure on the importance of politics). Local policy often supports local social innovation initiatives. With some exceptions, many initiatives remain unnoticed when it comes to national policy.

**Technology as a complementary factor.**

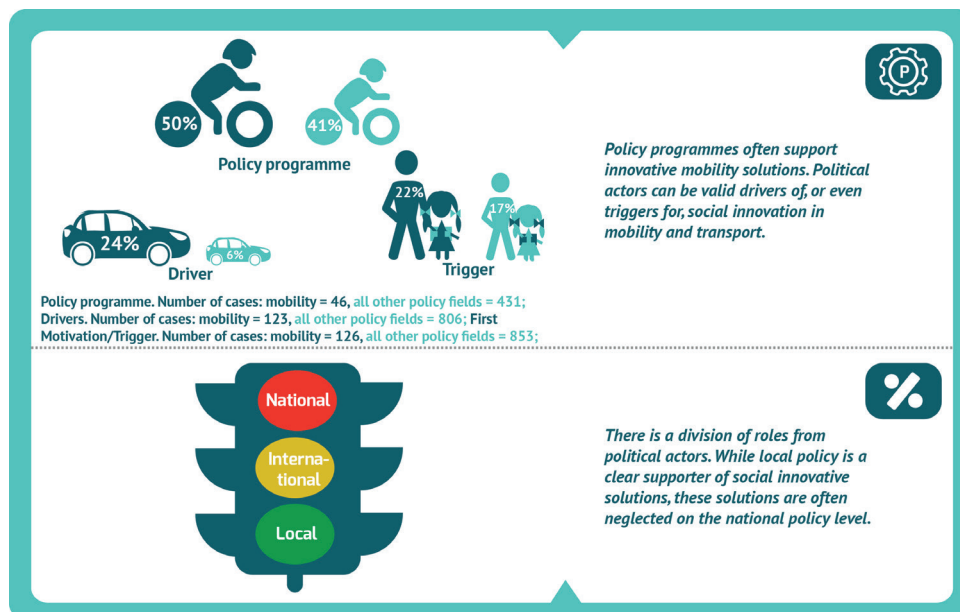
Technology is a substantial part of the social innovative initiatives in most practice fields [1, p. 15ff]. ICT and internet-based services are cross-cutting themes for mobility initiatives, technological solutions such as GPS tracking, electrical vehicles, on-board computers for car-sharing vehicles, computation in wheelchair delivery systems, and other technological features contribute to acceptance, growth, and spread of the initiatives (see figure on technology) Technology may not always be the first incentive or trigger for starting an initiative, but it plays a complementary role and has, in some cases, even made it possible to spread a solution across the globe (e.g. car-sharing and carpooling).



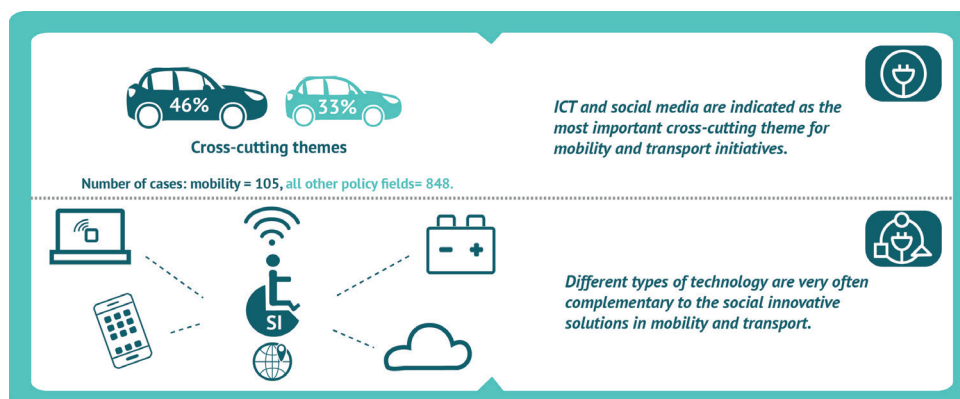
Practice fields in mobility and transport



Economic relevance of social innovation in mobility and transport. Empirical data from Butzin & Rabadjieva [2].



Importance of politics. Empirical data from Butzin et al. [1]



Technology in mobility SI. Empirical data from Butzin et al. [1]

## CONCLUSION

The support of social innovation initiatives as a driver for change in the mobility and transport system implies support from different kinds of actors. The understanding of mobility and transport actors needs to be broadened and go beyond the established sectoral boundaries to spread the many ideas developed in social innovation initiatives.

It is one of the central challenges of the European mobility and transport system to realize the potential of merging technological solutions and new social practices. First successful attempts underline the scope of possibilities: the practice of car-sharing is continuously further developing in light of solutions provided by smartphones and apps

(one-way car-sharing), and technologies of intelligent transport systems increasingly include human decision-making and behaviour to achieve higher efficiency. A massive change in power structures and re-orientation strategies are related to these latest developments. For example, does car-sharing heavily affect the business model of many established car manufacturers?

Furthermore, social innovation can be supported by creating incentives for companies, schools, and other actors to use alternative transport modes. There are many approaches fostering alternative transport modes that need to be better communicated to be spread more broadly. Local decision makers can actively promote the spread of social innovation by engaging in the implementation of ideas in their municipalities that have originally been developed elsewhere.

## REFERENCES

[1] Butzin, Anna/ Rabadjieva, Maria/ Emmert, Sophie (2017): Final Report: Social Innovation in Mobility and Transport – Main results. SI-DRIVE Deliverable 8.4.

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[3] Howaldt, Jürgen/ Schröder, Antonius/ Kaletka, Christoph/ Rehfeld, Dieter/ Terstriep, Judith (2016): Comparative Analysis (Mapping 1) – Mapping the World of Social Innovation: A Global Comparative Analysis across Sectors and World Regions. SI-DRIVE Deliverable 1.4.