

Some Considerations on the Role of Universities and Research Centers in EU-Funded Sustainable Mobility Projects

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Abstract. Stakeholder involvement is now part of formal requirements of almost any transportation decision-making process in Europe, increasing the complexity while allowing for better, shared decisions. European institutions strongly promote participatory processes and have developed a regulatory framework as well as guidelines and tools for successful and effective public engagement in transport planning. In this context, a variety of EU funded projects have been set up where territorial partners cooperate with universities and research centers in developing a sustainable mobility project and related public engagement strategies. This paper digs into the history and the current state of stakeholder involvement in transport projects, discussing through a broad literature analysis the theoretical evolution of the concept, controversies, drivers for phases and tools for effective engagement practices. Through the examples of the experience within European projects SMILE and SMART COMMUTING, this paper explores the role that academic institutions can play in engagement processes and possible contributions in terms of technical expertise and know-how transfer. Intermediate results from the projects' engagement efforts seem to validate the European Commission's belief that planned, continuous, open and interactive involvement of Universities may bring to better, shared and desirable decisions, consistently with findings from recent literature.

Keywords: Stakeholder involvement · Public engagement · Transport planning

1 Introduction

Stakeholder involvement or engagement has become common practice in the field of transport planning. Normative pushes and a growing conviction that participative planning brings to better, quicker processes have stimulated the diffusion of a number of involvement tools, each developed and adopted in response to specific needs and objectives within transport planning. In 1969, Arnstein [1] stated that participation is concerned with the redistribution of power, where those normally excluded from decision-making processes had the opportunity to be involved. Nowadays, this concept is incorporated within public participation, widely interpreted as involvement in decision-making with the specific purpose of influencing the choices being made, as

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opposite to consultation where local authorities receive suggestions and criticism but can simply reject contents considered irrelevant [2]. The overarching goal of engagement is to increase transparency of the decision-making process, with greater input from stakeholders and with their support upon taken decisions [3]. The participative approach is opposed to the DAD (Decide, Announce, Defend) syndrome, a term that in literature identifies planning processes where administrations pay little attention to stakeholder engagement, in the belief that professionals can choose for the best or because politicians feel fully entitled to represent the multitude of interests [4, 5]. Involving stakeholders and aligning their perceptions and views with the judgement of experts and decision-makers can be a challenging task as well as a rewarding experience, resulting in a more effective planning process and enhancing the value of the product [6–8]. According to Bickerstaff et al. [9], effective participation can be achieved by making it open, interactive, continuous, aided with effective feedback from participants. In the opinion of Glass [10] as cited in Lindenau and Boehler-Baedeker [11], public participation has the five key objectives of information exchange, education, support building, supplemental decision-making and representational input. The main targets and benefits of participation in planning processes are effectively synthetized by Krause [12] as follows: making processes more transparent, raising mutual understanding between involved parties, considering ideas, concerns, and everyday knowledge, improving the knowledge basis, increasing acceptability of planning processes. Controversies are still existing, however, on whether participatory processes generally prove effective or – instead - complicate the planning process, resulting in avoidable slowness and bad decision-making, or are grounded in political expediency [13].

The scope of this paper is to describe some successful cases of stakeholder engagement within the frame of EU-funded transport-related programs, validating the European institutions' belief that thoughtful participatory processes bring to better decision-making and highlighting the coordinative and formative role that universities and research institutions in general play within such programs. This is achieved by first presenting a discussion on three major topics:

1) The concept of stakeholders (who should be involved in the transport planning process?);
2) Public engagement in Europe, including a short history of involvement practices, hints to legislation and directives calling for engagement, phases, tools and characteristics of engagement during the transport planning process (why, when and how should stakeholders be involved in the transport planning process?);
3) Open controversies (what needs to be done to make sure the engagement process is effective?).

Moreover, this paper will discuss through the example of EU-funded projects SMILE and SMART COMMUTING the role(s) that the academic world can play within the stakeholder involvement process in transport planning, presenting activities and results of a twofold relation with project partners, seen as both stakeholders within the EU projects (university as administrative entity) and as authorities seeking for the best territorial participatory processes while developing plans and programs object of both SMILE and SMART COMMUTING projects (university as counsellor of administrations).

2 Stakeholder Involvement in Mobility Planning

2.1 A Momentum for Participation

Transport planning that incorporates public participation as an integral element is now a reality across Europe, both from an empirical perspective (registering numerous controversial discussions within urban communities) and from a regulatory perspective [9]. In particular, the European Commission has created a common framework for sustainable and participated mobility planning by promoting SUMPs (strategic Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans) and establishing as a strong principle the need to involve the public throughout the transport planning process, from the very beginning. Despite most countries introduced participation as part of their national planning procedures even before European efforts (prototypal are the cases of France, the UK and the United States), major differences in the levels of stakeholder engagement in different countries can still be registered and public involvement often interacts very little with more traditional transportation planning approaches [6]. The European Commission, by first integrating participation within the framework of environmental planning (since 2004) and by later developing the SUMP concept, has recognized transport planning as a multi-agent, multi-sector and multi-modal process which balances and engages with a wide range of interests, issues and policy areas, favoring a movement towards the development of more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes [14]. The first arguments towards participatory transport planning processes at European level have been encapsulated in a Decision-Makers' Guidebook on developing sustainable urban land use and transport strategies, dated 2004 [15]. Later significant documents are the Commission's Action Plan on Urban Mobility [16] which "encourages the development of incentives, such as expert assistance and information exchange" [17], and the subsequent 2011 White Paper [18] which proposed SUMPs to be a mandatory requirement for cities with a population over 100,000. The promoted concept places particular emphasis on the involvement of citizens and stakeholders, the coordination of policy between sectors (transport, land use, environment, economic development, social policy, health, safety, energy, etc.), between authority levels and between neighboring authorities [19]. In support and within this strong policy indication, a number of European projects have been carried out to provide guidance during the various phases of mobility planning, to identify stakeholders, actions, solutions, and to advice on essential and desirable elements of the planning process [20, 21]. A review of some of such projects can be found in May [16], while the following paragraphs contain some considerations addressing the primary questions of stakeholder engagement: who, why, when and how to involve?

2.2 Stakeholder Involvement: Opportunity or Hindrance for the Transport Planning Process?

Despite political and cultural difference between countries remain present, the way transport decisions are made is changing, and a tendency for more groups to become involved in the decision-making process is clearly visible [22]. A wide range of people and organizations have interests in transport projects and become involved, to varying

degrees, in decision-making. These are collectively known as "stakeholders" and may or may not have a professional interest in the project; their opposition can make its process very difficult. Stakeholders are commonly classified into "primary" and "secondary" where primary stakeholders are defined as those with a direct interest, depending from the project or being directly involved in its exploitation in some way, and secondary stakeholders would be those with a more indirect interest [6]. Following similar criteria, the distinction between "stakeholders" and "actors" [23], or "stakeholders" and "citizens" [24] can be found in literature. Interestingly, scholars seem to not fully agree terms: according to Ballantyne et al. [23] "stakeholders are all that have an interest in the system of urban freight transport; whereas actors are those that have a direct influence on the system. Therefore, all actors are, but not all stakeholders are actors." For Le Pira et al. [24], instead, actors can be categorized in three classes: experts (key informants), stakeholders (e.g. institutions, transport companies, environmental associations), and citizens. According to them, experts have high competence but low stake, stakeholders have competence and high stake, and citizens have low competence but act in the public interest, coherently with the public engagement pyramid (Fig. 1, left). A diffused stakeholder classification is that proposed by Gardner et al. [25], based on two levels of interests and two levels of power (Fig. 1, right). Table 1 shows a comprehensive list of typical stakeholder groups involved in transport project, based on outcomes of GUIDEMAPS project [26] and published by Wefering et al. [19] within the European Platform on Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans guidelines for plans development and implementation.

A number of authors recall the importance and the relevance of stakeholder engagement practices, from both a regulatory perspective and from an empirical and academic perspective. A consistent body of literature, however, stresses potential controversies rising from participation processes, particularly claiming that while involvement is now a fundamental requirement of mobility planning, it can lead to counterproductive results, such as slowness and inconclusiveness of the processes, or it can be treated as a sterile, inconvenient step and flattened to political expediency [13]. Lindenau and Boehler-Baedeker [11] synthetize some principle questions concerning the paradigm of participatory planning. In particular, they identify a question of

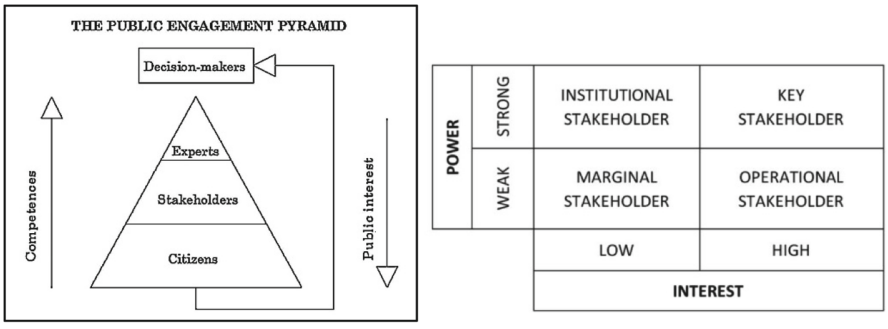

Fig. 1. Diffused types of actor/stakeholder classification. Sources: Le Pira et al. [24] and Gardner et al. [25]

Table 1. Typical stakeholder groups involved in transport projects. Source: GUIDEMAPS project [26]

Typical stakeholder groups involved in transport projects (based on GUIDEMAPS)			
Government / Authorities	**Businesses / Operators**	**Communities / Local Neighbourhoods**	**Others**
Local authorities	Transport operators/ providers	National environmental NGOs	Research institutions
Neighbouring cities	Transport consultants	Motorist associations	Universities
Local transport authority	Car sharing companies	Trade unions	Training institutions
Traffic police	Bicycle rental operators	Media	Experts from other cities
Other local transport bodies	Other mobility providers	Local authority Forums	Foundations
Other local authority bodies	National business associations	Local community organisations	
Politicians	Major employers	Local interest groups	
Other decision-makers	Private financiers	Cycle/walking groups	
Partnering organisations	International/national business	Public transport user groups	
Project managers	Regional/local business	Transport users	
Professional staff	Local business associations	Citizens	
Emergency services	Small businesses	Visitors	
Health & safety executives	Retailers	Citizens in neighbouring cities	
European Union	Utility services (e.g. electric, telecoms)	Disabled people	
Ministry of transport	Engineers/contractors	Landowners	
Other national ministries		Transport staff	
Regional government		Parents/children	
		Older people	

democracy (does participation actually fulfill democratic requirements since it is based on a representative decision-making process, only involving small sections of the public?); a question of acceptance (does participation actually ensure acceptance of transport policy and measures?); a question of quality (some scholars – see Dietz and Stern [27] - argue that the consultation of low-expertise public with a wide range of less significant interests might compromise the expected quality level of participated decisions). Together with principle questions, some practical aspects still pose a challenge to local authorities when carrying out participatory processes, despite EU and local guidelines. A relevant issue is in particular how to take involvement results into account in an ongoing transport planning process and how to come to a joint, accepted decision if proposals from the public are unrealistic, unfeasible and – a matter of particular concern – financially not viable [11]. Authorities have often tried to avoid participatory processes leading to unsatisfactory situations for involved parties by flattening the process to minimum required efforts, thus emptying it from its conceptualized meaning and grounding them in instrumental political motivations [13]. Ward [28] argues that diverse stakeholder participation in transport planning is potentially

beneficial but difficult to achieve. He supports a hypothesis that an increase in stakeholder diversity improves problem definition and innovation diversity, and falsifies the hypothesis that stakeholder inclusion makes planning expensive and inconclusive. However, he also finds that stakeholder involvement is often obstructed by centralized power structures, consistently with other literature reported above. In the long term, a greater dispersal of power in society may be required for ensuring meaningful participation processes, states Ward, but meanwhile forum obstruction by powerful actors can be prevented by enhanced legitimization and guidance from existing authorities, among which universities and research centers. In this regard, the next paragraphs will discuss phases of involvement and tools which have been identified by literature and by authorities as keys towards successful participatory transport planning. The SUMP concept has indeed been developed recently and provides guidance and tools for stakeholders participation; its effectiveness has not yet been proved by a substantial body of literature but results from carried out and ongoing projects are promising [17].

2.3 The Stakeholder Involvement Process

A specific type of involvement and precise targets should be sought in any moment of the planning process. Stakeholder and citizen involvement should be carefully planned, answering four main questions that most EU guidance documents report as backbones of engagement strategies [19, 26]:

- Why (is the engagement process being undertaken)? How will it influence the strategy/scheme?
- Who (should be involved in the decision-making process)?

This first two issues have been discussed in Sect. 2.2, where the scope and critical issues of engagement processes, a definition of stakeholders and key characteristics of the groups to be included in the process have been explored.

- When (should different activities take place/is it (not) appropriate to engage)?
- How (will engagement be undertaken)? What tools and techniques should be used?

These two last questions will be the topic of the following paragraphs, starting from a discussion of possible engagement phases as recognizable in literature.

The transportation decision-making process is normally considered to be composed of six phases [26]: problem definition, option generation, option assessment, formal decision taking, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. At each phase, different levels of public engagement can be identified and adopted, accordingly to the contextually chosen participation tools and to the specific decision-making process [6]. Kelly et al. [3] proposed five levels of stakeholders involvement: the first one deals with stakeholder identification; the second one with a systematic listening activity of requests from stakeholders as well of the social, cultural and economic climate; the third one concerns sharing information with stakeholder, differently from consultation (fourth level) where each stakeholders' perspective is taken into account with the aim of improving the project and its social acceptability. Finally, participation is the level in which interested groups become joint decision makers during the project design and implementation. Buhrmann et al. [29] provided a six-step engagement process, later

adopted by CIVITAS project [30] in their "Toolkit on organizing successful consultation". The steps are: issue(s) specification, stakeholder identification, actor constellation analysis, involvement strategy setup, stakeholder consultation, evaluation and follow-up. According to GUIDELINES project [26] public engagement is a parallel and contextual phase to project management and both are affected by the same constraints, either contextual barriers (institutional, legal or financial restrictions) or process barriers (which arise during the various stages of the transport project). Figure 2 shows the "involvement spectrum" as reported in [30].

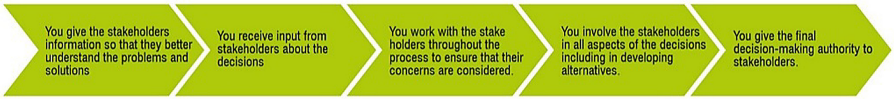

Fig. 2. Possible levels of stakeholder involvement. Source: CIVITAS project [30]

A generalized but at the same time well-received answer to the question of when to engage for achieving successful decision making can be "as early as possible in the course of the process". Recent literature and EU guidelines indeed indicate two major mistakes in former unsuccessful engagement efforts: on the one side, the public has often been informed rather than involved; on the other side involvement practices have been undertaken too late in the process and/or with inappropriate tools and techniques, not considering its dynamic nature [6, 19, 26].

2.4 Participation Tools

Engagement or participation tools are designed to help engaging stakeholder in the decision-making process, in order to achieve broadly accepted solutions to transport problems, addressing controversies and special interests. Selecting the most appropriate tool of engagement is crucial to the process's success, as the choice of unsuitable techniques might not only bring to poorer results, but it can create avoidable barriers to the process as a whole, in case it appears that decision-makers are in some ways being selective in who and how they engage [26]. Using a combination of participation tools likely increases the possibility to gather a more representative response, but the appropriate choice must be related to the purpose of engagement, to the target stakeholders, to the level of expertise of the authority and to available resources [6]. As highlighted in Table 2, originally presented by GUIDEMAPS project [26] and cited or reported by a number of following projects [30] and recent papers on the topic [6, 11], three major tools groups can be identified (information giving and gathering, interactive engagement, hard engagement to reach groups), for a total of eight tools and twenty-seven ore specific techniques or activities.

The first 12 techniques in the GUIDEMAPS's [26] table are examples of information giving and input collecting. For information-giving purposes, different media can be considered (TV, radio, letters, posters, and anything uploadable on the Internet). An effort to increase the variety and mixture of chosen communicative channels should

Table 2. GUIDEMAPS project tool matrix [26]

Classifications ● generally applicable ○ partially applicable	1 Letters	2 Posters, notices and signs	3 Leaflets and brochures	4 Fact sheets	5 Newsletters	6 Technical reports	7 Telephone techniques	8 Radio shows & TV shows	9 Internet techniques	10 Web-based forums	11 Questionnaire surveys	12 Key person interviews	13 Exhibitions	14 Information centres	15 Information sessions/briefings	16 Public meetings	17 Topical events	18 Community visits	19 Focus groups	20 Workshops	21 Citizen juries	22 Technical working parties	23 Stakeholder conferences	24 Transport visioning events	25 Weekend events	26 Planning for Real®	27 Open-space events
Who to engage																											
Wider audience	○	●	●	○	●		●	●	●	○	●		●	●		●	○			○			○			●	○
Targeted audience	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○		●	●	●			●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
When to engage																											
Problem definition	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
Option generation				○				○		●	○	●		○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Option assessment	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	○
Formal decision making	○			○		●				○		●			○						○	●					
Implementation plan	○	●	●	●	●	●		○	●				●	●	●	○	○	○		○		○			○		
Monitoring and evaluation						●	●			○	●	●								○		○			○		
Type of project																											
Strategy	○	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Scheme	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●
Duration of engagement																											
Restricted	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Continuous		○			○		●		●	●				●								○					

be made, especially if the target group is not very specific. An synergistic way to combine information giving and input collecting is to open information stands or centers, or to set up information events (techniques 13 to 17). Such activities can be both addressed to a formal public, for instance with hearings, and to a more general audience, for instance through games and playful activities. Techniques 18 to 22 are designed to reach selected stakeholders in small groups. These techniques can result in a more open and productive debate with active participation and ownership of the project, especially when the project length and complexity require slowly digging towards common ground and shared views. Conversation with selected stakeholders can be useful, but should not replace engagement with wider communities.

Techniques 23 to 27 are designed for consultation with large groups of stakeholders and are ideal to test wide range of options or to receive opinions and feedback on the project as a whole. Techniques include holding conferences, workshops and lectures and workshops, or events at which target groups propose solutions through the analysis of the existing situation.

To ensure that the most appropriate tools are adopted at each stage, the participation process should be planned well in advance, possibly by developing community involvement plans [30] if a similar instrument is not framed within the planning process in itself, as it is in the case of SUMPs [15]. In any case, well managed interaction among stakeholders has demonstrated to foster the emergence of coalitions, facilitating

the convergence to a well-accepted solution, often changing stakeholders' mind about the policy under discussion [31].

3 Stakeholder Involvement in EU Projects SMART COMMUTING and SMILE

Interreg Adrion project SMILE (FirSt and last Mile Inter-modal mobiLity in congested urban arEas of Adrion Region) aims at enhancing capacity for integrated transport and mobility services and at multimodality; Interreg Central Europe project SMART COMMUTING pursues cooperation in preparing Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) among partner Functional Urban Areas (FUAs). In both projects, the authors' research unit at IUAV University of Venice is involved as technical partner, with the specific role of coordinating the common transnational strategies and to guide and support project partners - thanks to the specific expertise - in every phase of the process, from the analysis of the status-quo and of possible scenarios to planning and implementation of the chosen strategies, measures and actions. The scope of this section is to highlight the role that academic institutions, thanks to their technical expertise, play in mobility-related EU project, acting as both activators of the project itself (through partner involvement) and as proper technical experts, supporting partners in identifying and engaging stakeholders, local groups, and special interests.

From an engagement perspective, IUAV's role in the projects is twofold. On the one side, the University, as technical partner, is the authority that interacts with the various stakeholders (territorial partners), collecting their needs and suggestions and amalgamating stances to reach a common, shared, project-wide transnational strategy, then devised into local peculiar characteristics at a later stage.

On the other side, IUAV's role is that to provide support in conducting an effective and successful public and stakeholder involvement strategy at each partner's local level.

Being SMILE and SMART COMMUTING projects part of EU programs, the timing schedule for stakeholder engagement had been detailed within the application procedure, in compliance with current recommendations [15, 19, 26]. This has provided a basis for successful involvement, shifting the focus to appropriate tools identification from the very first stage of the projects. IUAV's contribution as technical partner is provided both via telematic means (emails, Skype, digital tools), mostly establishing direct communication channels with single project partners, and at project meetings, when the possibilities to engage project partners and transmit expertise for local involvement strategies are noticeable. This complex situation requires that a wide spectrum of engagement tools is directly used by the University or is explained to project partners for local empirical application.

More in detail, during project meetings (taking place every three to six months) IUAV aims at involving a targeted audience (project partners) through direct engagement in daily activities, promoting group work and discussion to reach a shared solution to the specific objective at hand. In this case, engagement tools such as focus groups, workshops, briefings, technical tables, surveys and questionnaires, field visits and other interactive options are most commonly chosen. In both projects SMILE and

SMART COMMUTING, the interaction among partners with IUAV's guidance has successfully led to the definition of transnational SUMP schemes (or strategies), common cognitive umbrellas under which to elaborate (or reinforce, if already initiated) local SUMPs mirroring local peculiarities [32, 33]. The in-project participatory approach is particularly useful as partners, while experiencing in first person, acquire know-how and capacity to correctly replicate at local level engagement techniques. To ensure that gained skills are effectively used at local level, IUAV prepares templates, reports and documents (to be followed, used as guidelines and/or filled) and constantly checks partner progress. Despite the focus of project meetings clearly being that of establishing a fruitful dialogue between project partners as to reach shared views and outputs and carry the project forwards, the side aspect of expertise transfer to partners is fundamental, and should express not only the potential of the possible results that can be achieved, but also their importance in terms of concrete applications [34–39]. In between project meetings and for the course of the whole project, IUAV is in charge of checking partners' progress. Due to European sustainable mobility guidelines requirements, authorities (in this case, territorial partners of SMILE and SMART COMMUTING projects) are required to constantly involve local stakeholders (target groups) and actively and to continuously report the outputs of the process. The University as technical partner provides materials and suggests options for successful involvement at the various stages, accordingly with

Table 3. SMART COMMUTING targets and values. Source: SMART COMMUTING project application form

D.2 Target groups

Target groups	*Please further specify the target groups (e.g., ministry, university, chamber of commerce etc.) - see examples in annex IV of the application manual (classification of target groups)*	*Target value* *Please indicate the size of the target group the project aims to actively involve.*
Local public authority	It is expected that SMART COMMUTING will involve 40 municipalities belonging to the 7 FUAs in which the project activities will be developed.	40,00
Infrastructure and (public) service provider	It is expected that SMART COMMUTING will involve 21 public transport service companies (on average, 3 per each FUA).	21,00
Education/training centre and school	Schools are big generators of daily commuting, so the main 3 schools in each FUA will be involved in project activities.	21,00
Large enterprises	Large enterprises are, together with schools, big generators of daily commuting. The larger 4 companies in each FUA will be involved in project activities.	28,00
General public	Through the communication strategy channelled through socal media, it will be searched a contact with thousands of commuters (indicatively 5.000 in each FUA), to influence their attitude and change their behaviours.	35.000,00
Interest groups including NGOs	Trade unions and trade associations will be involved in each FUA (5 per area) to disseminate to entrepreneurs and workers the SMART COMMUTING's outputs and results, with the aim of changing the current commuting models.	35,00
Business support organisation	The chambers of commerce in each FUA will be involved in promoting at territorial levels the new approaches and tools set up by SMART COMMUTING, in particular towards the economic stakeholders.	7,00
Regional public authority	As far as possible representatives of regional governments will take part in the works of the institutional coordination structures set up at FUA level and in the annual conferences.	7,00

the project's application forms, with EU guidance, and with emerging local peculiarities. Besides constantly monitoring, checking and correcting project partners' performances, IUAV is available to participate and/or co-organize local engagement events, workshops, and seminars at partners locations, thus actively coordinating public engagement processes. Given the broad approach, according to the different phases of the projects most engagement tools among those discussed in Sect. 2.4 are presented to partners and used. Printed information materials and questionnaires, online information and surveys, digital materials, all with options for interested parties to provide their opinion, are among the most commonly used tools.

Under IUAV's supervision, public engagement activities are being successful. Tables 3 and 4 show predetermined target groups and values which, with IUAV's collaboration, had been identified in a preliminary phase as satisfactory to be reached in the course of the projects.

In both SMILE and SMART COMMUTING projects SUMPs drafts have not yet been finalized, but the numbers of reached "targets" are already positive. According to SMILE communication management, as of January 2020 107 specific target groups had

Table 4. SMILE project targets and values. Source: SMILE project application form

C.2.2 Target groups

Target group/s	Please further specify the target group/s (e.g., bilingual elementary schools, environmental experts, etc.)	Target value Please indicate the size of the target group you will reach. The budget cannot be higher than that of WP Communication
local public authority	The local public authorities will be involved in the depiction of mobility scenarios, elaboration of the SUMP transnational scheme, testing of IT solutions, and hence in using the ouputs generated by the related activities.	10.00
regional public authority	The regional public authorities will share project's activities , outputs and results, and will support local authorities in achieving the expected changes.	10.00
national public authority	The national ministries of infrastructure and transport (starting from Italy, which Ministry is an associated partner in SMILE) will be contacted and involved in order to spread out the use of project's ouputs and results.	7.00
sectoral agency	Regional/local development agencies will use SMILE's outputs (methodology for depicting the mobility scenarios, transnational scheme for SUMPs elaboration, IT solutions) to assist the local authorities in order to make more sustainable the urban mobility	10.00
infrastructure and (public) service provider	IT solutions will be used by bodies in charge of parking management, tourism buses companies, freight delivery companies to make more efficient and intermodal the urban mobility.	30.00
interest groups including NGOs	Civil society organization active in the field of environment and sustainable mobility will be enabled by SMILE's outputs to reinforce their activity aimed at making more liveable the urban areas.	10.00
higher education and research	Mobility scenarios and elaboration of a transnational scheme for SUMPs elaboration will allow higher education & research centres, settled in areas concerned, to refine their knowledge of hosting territory and hence their provision of competent support.	20.00
General public	All the users of motorized vehicles (cars drivers, drivers of tourist buses, freight delivery couriers) could use the APP of SMILE.	20 000.00

been actively involved through communication strategy and website, promotional materials, academic/scientific publications, public events, digital activities, evaluation of dissemination actions. Additionally, more than 20,000 people part of "general public" had been consulted and invited to participate. Up to date data from SMART COMMUTING project are at the time of writing not available to the authors, but similar numbers to those reported for SMILE had been reached halfway through the SUMPs drafting process already.

4 Conclusions

European legislation and guidelines, as well as recent literature on the topic, all recognize that despite some evidences exist that stakeholder involvement processes don't always lead to better transportation decision making, if those processes are carried out correctly and effectively outcomes are strongly positive. In particular, public and stakeholder engagement allows for better, shared decision making, quicker processes, higher stake and public acceptance, higher reliability. Ever since the EU has introduced the SUMP concept for sustainable, participated urban mobility in the early 2000s, a number of authors and projects have published evidence of the positive impacts of public engagement in transport decision making processes. SMILE and SMART COMMUTING are among the EU projects that capitalize on SUMPs theory and develop a transnational SUMP scheme for addressing transport-related problems in urban areas throughout central and Adriatic Europe. This paper has proposed a literature review on public engagement in transport planning, discussing its history and evolution towards its current compulsoriness, past and present controversies, phases and tools for successful stakeholder involvement processes, in accordance with European guidelines. The authors have then introduced an overview of the role that academic institutions play within European mobility-related projects, highlighting their contribution in both engaging and informing project partners and in providing assistance when identifying, engaging and discussing local stakeholders (or group). Details of the role of the authors' research unit within European projects SMILE and SMART COMMUTING have been reported in Sect. 3, showing how within well planned processes and with constant technical support the public engagement process proves effective at reaching and involving a wide public. While for the two mentioned undergoing projects SUMPs drafting has not yet been completed, this paper has brought evidence that continuous, first-stage, well-organized academic inclusion – carried out in compliance with EU indications – leads to successful decision-making, by incorporating multiple perspectives and competences and by facilitating convergence towards shared solutions. It is therefore expectable that SMILE and SMART COMMUTING partners' SUMPs will reflect public perceptions and will encounter easier implementation compared to unilaterally promoted plans and projects or to processes only benefitting from partial, superficial public information activities.

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