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Steps towards sustaining a SUMP Network in Greece

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Abstract

Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) have been for some years now an important tool for municipalities and regions in the European Union (EU) Member States for achieving their goals in their jurisdictions and improving the daily life of their citizens. The EU has adopted the SUMP approach and supports all related efforts through various actions and initiatives. Along these lines, the transnational project ENDURANCE attempts to promote the concept of SUMPs by creating national networks of cities and other entities that would agree, by joining them, to start developing such plans in their area. There are several different examples of such networks in the EU at European or national level. For Greece, the effort is in progress and so far meets the positive response of several Municipal Authorities. The issues that need to be addressed are not few and definitely not minor, with most important ones the lack of appropriate staff in municipal and regional services, the lack of relevant experience and culture and the lack of funding. Moreover, the absence of an appropriate policy about Sustainable mobility at national level, which would set the framework for the lower levels of government, creates additional difficulties in achieving the sought objectives. To cope with these problems, specific proposals are made based on relevant recommendations by experts and also from round table discussions at recent events about this subject. Based on a national survey made by the local ENDURANCE team (national focal point) to a number of Municipalities eager to become part of a Greek SUMP network issues such as the preferred network form and its financing, the network technical support mechanisms, staff training and the interaction with existing governance structures are examined. The preferences of the Municipalities surveyed may be exploited as a useful guidance to other SUMP network cases having similarities to Greece.

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1. Introduction – the SUMP concept

Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) have been for some years now an important tool for municipalities and regions in the European Union (EU) member states for achieving their goals in their jurisdictions and improving the daily life of their citizens. The EU has adopted the SUMP approach and supports all related efforts through various actions and initiatives.

According to the SUMP Guidelines prepared by Rupprecht Consult (2013), SUMPs are long term strategic plans designed to satisfy the mobility needs of people and businesses in cities and their surroundings for a better quality of life. A SUMP is a new planning concept able to address transport related problems in a more sustainable and comprehensive way.

The main differences of a SUMP from a conventional transportation plan can be summarized in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Differences between a conventional Transport Plan and a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan.

Traditional Transport Planning	Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning
Focus on traffic	Focus on people
Primary objective;	Primary objective;
Traffic flow capacity and speed	Accessibility and quality of life
Modal-focused	Integrated with land use, economic development, social needs, environmental quality, and health
Short- and medium-term perspective	Long-term vision
Administrative boundaries	Functional boundaries considering travel-to-work areas
Domain of traffic engineers	Interdisciplinary planning
Infrastructure focus	Combination of infrastructure, market, services, information, and promotion to achieve cost-effective solutions
Limited impact assessment	Intensive evaluation of impacts and shaping of a learning and improvement process
Political mandates and planning by experts	Important stakeholders and the public are actively involved

Source: Guidelines, Developing and implementing a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans.

The significance of SUMPs was recognised by the European Commission in its Action Plan on Urban Mobility in 2009, where reference to the provision of guidance material, to best practice exchange and to support of educational material to professionals was made. Similarly, the Council of the European Union in 2010 stated its support to the development of SUMPs encouraging the development of incentives for the creation of such plans. Finally, the Transport White Paper of the European Commission in 2011 stated that cities above a certain size should be encouraged to develop Urban Mobility Plans and that cohesion funding would be possible in the future only if a current and independently validated Urban Mobility Plan is available.

Currently the SUMPs are enjoying recognition from many Regional and Municipal Authorities all over Europe and are becoming part of the Authorities' agenda. However, given the differences in the government structures in the EU members states as well as the legal, institutional and cultural differences of the involved authorities, continuous and significance effort is required in order to adopt and adapt the SUMP concept.

2. The ENDURANCE project

2.1. The ENDURANCE project

Along these lines, the European project ENDURANCE (2012) has as main aim to establish enduring national Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) networks in all European Union countries and Norway and also to establish an enduring and integrated European SUMP audit, training and policy transfer network.

The project duration is 3 years (2013–2016) and is financed by 75% from Community fund. ENURANCE is implemented in 25 European countries from 28 partner members of the Consortium and pursues its objective through networking, education and the exchange of good practices and experiences between countries. For Greece is designated as National Focal Point the Department of Civil Engineering of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

ENDURANCE has as its main target the activation of 250 cities in the EU with population over 100.000 inhabitants. Upon the completion of the project a national network of cities will be created – one for each of the 25 European Union countries participating in the project – and which cities have expressed interest in SUMP. At the end of the program, the authorities of the cities of each network will be asked to sign a statement (similar to the Covenant of Mayors for the environment) with which are bound to follow – when of course their needs and resources define that – the principles and standards of a SUMP.



Fig. 1. The ENDURANCE EU SUMP Network (http://www.epomm.eu/newsletter/electronic/1013_EPOMM_enews_EN.php).

In addition, the programme supports local authorities in developing Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, covering freight and passenger transport in urban and suburban areas. It also provides guidance material, promotes the exchange of best practices and supports educational activities. Finally, it seeks close cooperation between Member States to ensure that the concept of SUMP is adjusted to their specific requirements and the existing design practices in each Member State and that it is actually promoted at a national level.

The goal of ENDURANCE for Greece in particular is the creation of a national network of cities with population over 50.000 which intend to take action to improve their mobility conditions with the elaboration of such plans. Through this network the local authorities will be able to share good practice at national and European networks, receive the necessary support from qualified instructors for the design and the implementation of a SUMP and be

able to achieve a secure funding for its implementation. A total number of 66 municipalities meet the population criterion in the country. The large conurbation however are just two, Athens and Thessaloniki Metropolitan areas having approximately 4 million and 1 million inhabitants respectively.

Basic tools for the proper functioning of the national network of cities during the ENDURANCE life span are the annual events organized by the National Focal Point in each participating member state for the purpose of information, exchange of opinions and best practices, as well as workshops for the information, education and training of the stakeholders.

The Department of Civil Engineering of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki which is currently the National Focal Point for Greece, has organized in 2014 and 2015 two national workshops in which all Greek Municipalities with population over 50.000 inhabitants were invited along with other bodies involved in Mobility Management.

2.2. Main findings from national workshops

The main findings arisen from the two national workshops in Greece can be summarized in the following:

- The local authorities and other stakeholders are short both in terms of specialized staff that is necessary for the formulation and the implementation of a SUMP and of mentality with regard to participatory processes. The shortage in personnel in general and the workload that local municipalities face daily lives do not actually allow them to pay the necessary attention in the long and mid-term planning activities in which SUMP normally belong
- The representatives of local authorities have realized that they are going through a transition period and that they are required to assimilate the importance of SUMP and exploit them for attaining the objectives of their Municipal Authority. For this reason, there is a great interest from their side in participating in the ENDURANCE National workshops and in receiving relevant material which is considered quite useful to them.
- Given the current institutional framework in the country and the fact that recruiting of specialized personnel to cover their needs on SUMP related aspects, is practically not possible, the most feasible alternative seems to be the technical support by research institutions and individuals who have specialized knowledge in this subject.
- A sufficient number of representatives of local authorities agree that there must be a legal entity of public interest which will be able to provide various categories of services (education, expert support, updating – informing on SUMP developments, etc.) to the local authorities and all other stakeholders and interested parties that have a role in the city planning. The provision of these services should be continuous and should not depend on the financing of European projects that have an expiration date. This entity will be actually the Managing Unit of the National SUMP Network.

3. Examples of SUMP networks in the European Union

The European Union has recognized many years now the value of sharing knowledge and experience between European cities on issues of various kinds, one of which is sustainable mobility. As a result, EU promotes the creation of networks of cities in order to exchange knowledge, information and educational material between the partners in these networks.

Some of the most important networks at European level established in recent years with respect to sustainable mobility are presented below.

Polis is a network of European cities and regions working together to develop innovative technologies and policies for local transport. It also supports the exchange of experiences, knowledge transfer and facilitates the dialogue between the participating cities and other stakeholders in the transport sector, such as industry, research centers and universities.

EPOMM is the European Platform on Mobility Management, a network that brings together the governments of European countries dealing with mobility issues. The participating governments are represented by the ministries or other authorities responsible for mobility management in their countries. Under the project EPOMM-PLUS, EPOMM started the construction of 21 National networks in the 21 countries participating in the consortium. These networks bring together local, regional and national authorities and also transport authorities. The EPOMM-PLUS

managed to create national platforms and networks relevant to mobility management in most of the participating countries. Many National Focal Points of the ENDURANCE project use the existing network structures of EPOMM-PLUS.

In the context of European projects and initiatives such as the EPOMM-PLUS, the ENDURANCE, etc., new networks have been created in several EU Member States which aim to promote sustainable mobility and the concept of SUMP in their country. Some of these networks are the network ACT Travel Wise in the United Kingdom, which emerged in 2008 as a merger of the Association for Commuter Transport network and the Travel Wise Association network, the Alpine Pearls network regarding communities of the Alps from Germany, France, Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland, the LIVE network that coordinates around 500 professionals who work in the field of mobility management in Finland, the mobility management platforms in Belgium (BEPOMM) and in Sweden (SWEPOMM).

4. Involvement of stakeholders in SUMP in Greece

In Greece, the current legislative framework does not make clear reference as to which bodies are responsible for the development of SUMP. Both local authorities and the central government agencies can draft or delegate the drafting of such studies, if included in their approved program.

Due to the nature of SUMP, the consideration and examination of data and parameters that go beyond narrow administrative boundaries of a municipality is necessary. Similarly, the urban transport policies, land use, etc., will have no effect if they are only limited within the administrative boundaries of a municipality, especially if it is a metropolitan area consisting of several municipalities, but they should cover a geographical area mainly based on functional criteria. In this approach it is often necessary the involvement of several bodies with similar or linked responsibilities in the region. In this sense, the development of a SUMP in a greater urban area should be achieved either by a body whose jurisdiction covers all the municipalities in the area concerned or by a partnership of the municipalities involved. Certainly a SUMP can be further specified in the limits of a single municipality or even a part of it, but it must be consistent and compatible with the objectives and priorities identified for the region so that there are no conflicting policies and measures, something that unfortunately happens too often.

Figure 2 below presents in diagrammatic form the key actors as well as the other stakeholders that normally are involved in the formulation of a SUMP in a typical Greek case.

From this figure is evident that an effort to prepare and implement a SUMP in Greece may create a significant degree of complexity and confusion among the directly involved authorities in the same geographic area or in a part of it. For this reason it is considered necessary, especially at the local governance level, that a hierarchically superior, such as a regional authority, undertakes the responsibility to allocate responsibilities to the inferior authorities. It should be also noted that the collaboration in a SUMP is meaningful only when the draft proposals are adopted by the agencies involved in the implementation and become part of their technical program for the years to come. In the opposite case, SUMP remains a plan on paper without any substantial impact on the functioning of urban areas and citizens' everyday life.

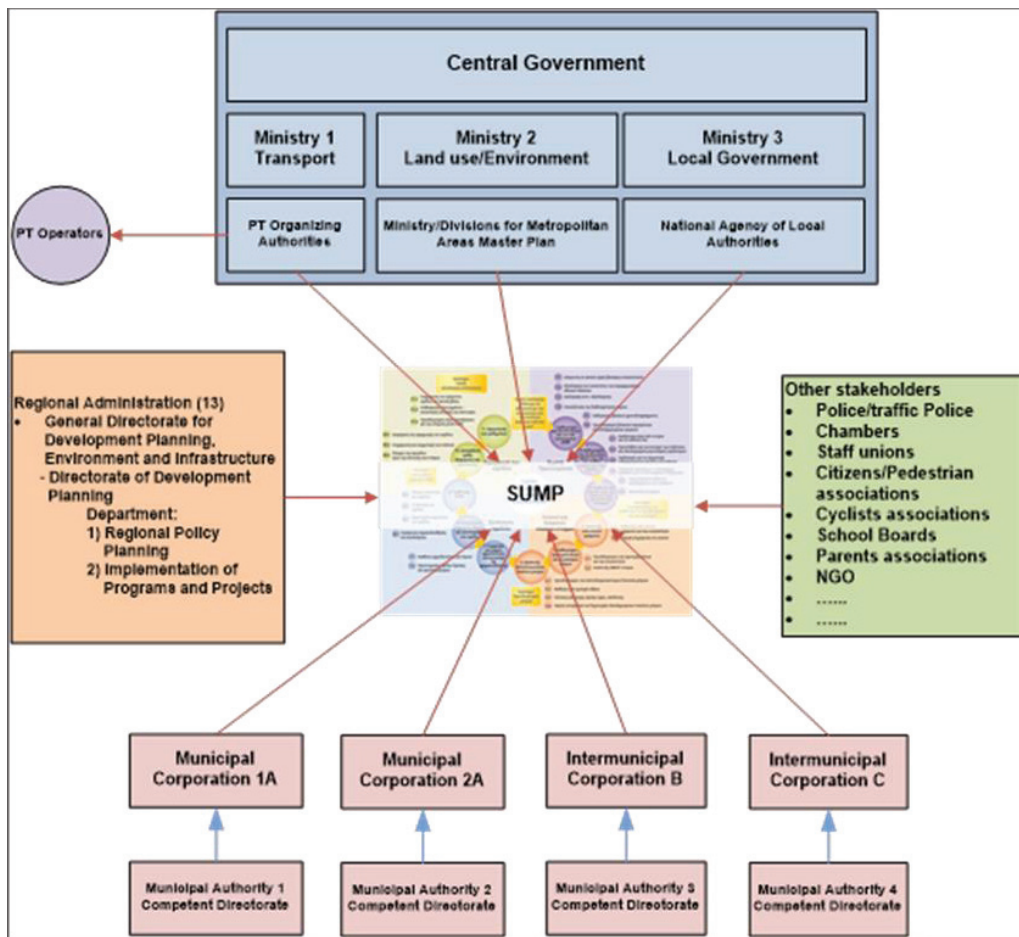


Fig. 2. Stakeholders per level of administration involved in a SUMP in Greece.

5. Sustaining a SUMP network in Greece

In order to identify the best possible way to support a future National SUMP network in Greece, the study team of the ENDURANCE National Focal Point examined several alternatives differentiating in some important aspects. The main idea has been that a certain legal entity could serve as a managing unit of the National Network. The aspects investigated through interviews with Municipality representatives are the following:

- The form of the managing entity
- The scope and objects of the entity
- Funding sources of the entity

For the above purpose a special interview form was designed and e-mailed to all Municipalities in Greece that showed interest in joining the SUMP network. The aim of the survey has been to gather a critical mass of responses pertaining to the positions of the Municipal representatives as well as to their potential proposals regarding the creation of a National Network and the entity that could best serve its objectives.

The survey questionnaire was designed in a simple and concise way to save time and effort of the respondents. At the beginning of the interview there was an extensive introduction, which was designed to inform respondents on issues related to the management entity of a National SUMP Network.

After the introduction and the description of the characteristics of the management unit, that will be presented below, participants were asked to answer a series of questions. At this point, it has been emphasized that the answers to the questions are not binding, either for the respondents or for the municipality to which they belong, but aim at a first mapping of the views of people who deal with these specific issues related to SUMP.

In the first part of the questionnaire respondents stated some basic information about their role, which authority they represent, what their occupation is and some personal contact information. They were also asked if they have participated in an event or seminar about SUMP and also if they were aware about the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans and their importance.

In the second part the respondents were asked to prioritize the various forms of organization of the Management entity that will be responsible for the operation of the National SUMP Network. The various forms of the Management unit were thoroughly analyzed in the introduction of the questionnaire.

More specifically the management structure which is in fact necessary for the existence and operation of a National SUMP Network can be ensured in alternative ways as follows:

1. Upon taking these responsibilities by an existing public interest entity like Aristotle University of Thessaloniki through the Research Committee and the creation of a specific project code.
2. Upon taking up responsibilities by the Institute of Transport and Sustainable Mobility (HIT), in CERTH (Centre of Research and Technology Hellas) located in Thessaloniki also maintaining a branch in Athens which is an institution of public interest.
3. With the establishment of a spin-off company from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki regarding the exploitation of expertise and serve both local authorities and other stakeholders.
4. With the creation of a non-profit organization in partnership between public and private sector in order to cope with specific objectives.

The first alternative is the simplest one and can be attained very quickly with relatively few and simple procedures. Similarly, the second alternative is also simple and requires in legal terms only the approval of the Board of Directors of CERTH after the preparation of a business plan. The third alternative is based on a more complex and time consuming legal framework but allows the creation of a special purpose body that it could be flexible and work with private-economic criteria. Finally, the fourth option is the most complex, time consuming and difficult since it requires the assent and taking relevant decisions from all participants. But once that will be implemented is binding for all and in this respect ensures the long life of the management entity.

Based on the above, respondents were asked to prioritize the various forms of the management entity from 1–4, where 1 is the most preferable one. They were also asked about what they consider to be a weak element in any form of management entity and what their suggestions to address these weaknesses are.

In the next part of the questionnaire the purpose and the objectives of the management entity were presented. Based again on what was described in the introduction of the survey the purpose of the management entity will be the existence, maintenance and expansion of the National SUMP Network. The objective of this body will be the promotion of SUMP as strategic planning tools for achieving Sustainable Mobility and the improvement of quality of life in Greek urban areas. The main objectives of the entity will be the operation, maintenance and continuous improvement of a platform for knowledge and best practices transfer to the members of the network through the internet and other modern means of communication, provide support and services to members of the network, organization and implementation of training seminars and education and training programs for executives of network members and third parties and finally the return of accreditation titles in matters relating to SUMP.

The respondents were asked if they agree or not with the above regarding the purpose and objectives of the Management entity and they were also encouraged to report what else they think it should be included in this.

In the last part of the questionnaire there were questions about the form of financing of the management entity. In particular the funding of the entity can be achieved in different ways depending on the range and type of objectives with which the entity is engaged, the exact legal form and the size of the network. Three funding scenarios that can

be applied practically in any legal form of the management body with the appropriate adjustments were described in the introduction of the interview form.

Table 2. Different forms of financing the Management Entity.

	Scenario description
1st scenario	Members of the National SUMP Network pay annually a subscription against specific contributory services. The subscription is proportional to the official population of each municipality. For other parties beside local authorities the amount of subscription is determined by other criteria, always depending on the services they expect to receive. Against this subscription the management entity maintains and updates the platform relative to SUMP and sends information material at regular intervals to the members of the network. It also undertakes the organization of a number of training courses, i.e. 3-4 times a year and in different geographic areas, and also prepares and distributes the necessary material. Depending on the amount of the subscription in contributory services may also be included additional services as needed by the local authorities, i.e. participation in relevant meetings in the municipality on issues relating to SUMP.
2nd scenario	As the 1st scenario but also the management entity offers specialized consulting services or “provides” specialists to local authorities and other agencies members of the national network. In any case fees are taken by the scientific experts via the operator who withholds a percentage of the fee to cover the costs, but also to improve its services. Network members have special privileges and special economic treatment than the local authorities or other entities who are not members of the network.
3rd scenario	Like the 2nd scenario but also the operator has the right to provide accreditation certificates of SUMP Manager/Coordinator following the successful examinations and against a fee.

Based on the above, respondents were asked to choose the best scenario in their opinion and fill in the amount of subscription that should be paid by each municipality in every possible funding scenario. They were also asked whether the amount of subscription should be proportionate to the population of each municipality and to indicate other possible criteria that can influence this amount.

As mentioned, the forms were sent by e-mail but telephone contacts were made to speed up the process and provide clarifications to the respondents.

6. Interview findings

Out of 66 forms sent to municipalities, 20 valid completed forms were collected. These interview forms were completed by employees in local municipal authorities specializing in fields related to transport, traffic and sustainable mobility.

Almost 70% of the respondents have participated in an event concerning SUMP and most of them in one of the two meetings that were organized by the Department of Civil Engineering of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki within the framework of ENDURANCE activities as previously described.. Quite high, almost 80%, was the proportion of the respondents who are aware of SUMP and their importance.

Regarding the ranking of the various forms of the management organization, the majority (60%) of the participants, chose an institution of public interest, such as Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, as the best form. In second place comes HIT. No one chose the spin-off company or a PPP non-profit organization as an option.

The respondents' answers about the weak elements of all forms of management entity are summarized below:

1. Public interest institution: The public nature of such a body can result in increased red tape and in the weakness to find adequate financial support and other funding sources.
2. HIT: The legal form and function of such an institution is far from the operation and structure of local authorities and potentially can lead to a distorted picture of the situation in the municipalities.
3. Spin-off Company: The creation of such kind of an entity can require long time procedures and the funding may not be sufficient.
4. PPP non-profit organization: Such partnerships in Greek reality have shown that they require complex and time consuming legal procedures.

To address these weaknesses respondents suggested further training and updating of the executives of the future management structure and their familiarization with the specific aspects of the functioning of local authorities.

All the respondents agreed with the characteristics of the management entity, as presented in the introduction of the questionnaire. However, about 40% of the sample considers that these characteristics should not include the award of accreditation titles on objectives concerning SUMP.

Based on the alternatives that were presented to them, 50% of the respondents considers as best funding scenario the first one. The third scenario follows with 30% and last is the second scenario with 20%. The responses of the sample are presented in the figure below.

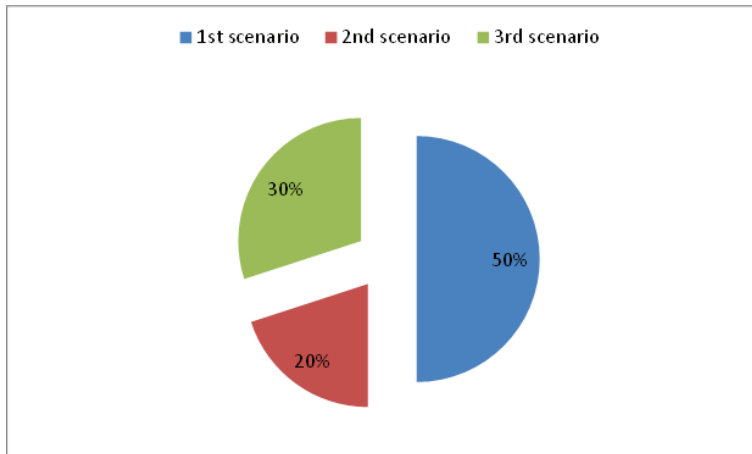


Fig. 3. Best funding scenario of the management unit.

7. Conclusions

A survey to Municipal Authorities' practitioners in Greece was conducted within the framework of the EU ENDURANCE project with the aim to obtain opinions and positions regarding the development of a management entity that will support and maintain the Greek National SUMP network. Twenty completed interview forms were returned or completed after a telephone communication following the e-mail transmission. The main questions were about the legal form of the entity, the scope and main objectives of the entity and the funding sources of the entity. Different alternatives were provided for each one of them, ranging from simple to more complex and demanding ones.

The analysis of the completed interview forms reveals that the majority of the respondents are in favour of a managing entity operating under the public sector umbrella, even if it functions as private firm. The highest preference among those offered was for a management unit operating within the University structure, which currently participates in the ENDURANCE project and could continue to play such a role in the future too. The Transport Research Institute, which is also an entity of public interest, was ranked in the second place. Reservations were though expressed as to the suitability of both the University and the Research Institute to play such a role.

The majority of those questioned agrees with the scope and objectives of such a managing entity as described by the team i.e. updating and maintaining the platform for the SUMP network, supporting the municipalities, providing some expert advice, providing periodical training and awarding accreditation titles. A percentage of 30% does not agree with the last objective.

Finally the majority of respondents have the opinion that Municipalities should contribute to the viability of such a managing entity by paying a fee that will be adequate for securing the maintenance and updating of the Greek SUMP platform and provide some training and supporting services to them, without the option of extra services with additional payment. They also proposed as an annual fee an amount exceeding 10,000 per municipality adjusted to the population.

The above findings may be considered as quite satisfactory, especially in the case of a country with weak tradition in planning activities and participatory processes. It appears that the national workshops which took place as part of the ENDURANCE projects but also from other MM projects in the recent years, have already created a positive foot print. This evolution is expected to further improve in the near future, mainly because of repetitive events and efforts to educate people in Municipal authorities about the advantages of SUMP's and the ways these can offer solutions to the problems they deal with every day.

However, there is still a wide margin to be filled regarding the opinions of Municipal practitioners in matters related to the cooperation among public and private sector partners. Public sector representatives still seem to trust more public sector functional schemes than private or mixed ones. This apparently stems from habits that have been evolved over many years in the past and have to do with the institutional and cultural environment that was prevailing. It will take time until the attitudes of politicians and local representatives change. It is believed that the role of projects like ENDURANCE serves exactly this purpose.

Finally, it should be also mentioned that all these obstacles, barriers and objections are common to the majority of the European member states, especially to those with limited experience in planning and stakeholders' coordination. This fact is something that should be seriously taken into consideration by the EU policy when it stresses the need for harmonization of the member states in common actions, planning procedures and regulations'.

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