

Effective communication strategies and packages in the cities of Hasselt, Gent, Mol and Geel, Flanders

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Abstract - The introduction of the mobility covenant programme in Flanders created a demand for innovative communication strategies and packages with the public in general, and with target groups or stakeholders in particular. To avoid the pitfall of technocracy and ‘dead’-end costly exercises in sustainable mobility schemes, public support becomes indispensable. Information and communication initiatives, mobility management packages, interaction with stakeholders on the demand-side were launched as an integrated and essential part of the new urban mobility policies.

In this paper some Flemish best practice cases in effective communication are presented. The successful and popular Hasselt SAM case is characterised as a multi targeted action campaign to support the overall municipal mobility policy. The Gent case is an effective top – down campaign and actionprogramme for a liveable city. The success factor in the Gent case is the political commitment, willingness and leadership. The two small-scale city cases, Mol and Geel, are characterised as an effective and interactive partnership with the educational community.

1. Introduction [1] [2]

The introduction of the mobility covenant programme in Flanders created a demand for innovative communication strategies and packages with the public in general, and with target groups or stakeholders in particular (the business community, the educational community, administrations or the leisure sector). Consequently, the traditional billboard campaigns were gradually completed by target group oriented and innovative interactive communication and marketing initiatives.

Signing the mobility covenant committed all the partners involved to become responsible partners in the new mobility policy. There was a growing feeling that the new urban sustainable mobility policies and schemes would remain technocratic and ‘dead’-end costly exercises, if not accepted or, at least, partially supported by the public. Co-production of policies and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders became the norm from 1997 on.

This is where mobility management comes in. Three definitions:

1. The common EU definition of mobility management, as coined in the EU Momentum and Mosaic projects in 1999:

“MM is primarily a demand oriented approach to influencing passenger and freight movement, that involves active partnerships to support and encourage a change of attitude and behaviour towards sustainable modes of transport. MM tools are wide ranging and usually require the active cooperation and coordination of partners, based on information, communication, and organisational initiatives, and require promotion.”

“The objectives of Mobility Management should include:

- encouraging greater use of sustainable transport modes*
- improving sustainable accessibility for all people and organisations*
- increasing the efficiency of use of transport and land use infrastructure*
- reducing traffic (growth) by limiting the number, length and need of motorised vehicle trips.”*

2. The Swedish definition: *‘Soft- mind- and orgware’ which influences travel before travel starts .*

3. The Flemish definition: *Mobility management bridges the demand and the supply side, keeping both sides connected within a sustainable development context.*

Within the rising Flemish urban mobility planning culture, the need for effective communication became gradually obvious. In this paper some Flemish best practice cases in effective communication are selected.

1. The Hasselt case is characterised as a multi targeted action campaign to support the overall municipal mobility policy. The very nature of these actions aimed at visibility on the streets and encouragement of residents to participate. The action, called SAM (Together Towards a New Mobility Culture) gradually became the leading and well-know leitmotiv of the city’s mobility policy and supported the implementation of some major infrastructural projects.
2. The Gent case is characterised as an effective top – down campaign and actionprogramme for a liveable city, leading to a wide range of large and small scale projects regarding pedestrianisation, cycling, public transport and parking. The success factor in the Gent case is the political commitment, willingness and leadership.
3. The two small-scale city cases, Mol en Geel, are characterised as an effective and interactive partnership with the educational community.

2. HASSELT, “SAM - Samen Anders Mobiel” (Together Towards a New Mobility Culture) [1] [3]



The city of Hasselt is the commercial and services centre of the province of Limburg (B). Hasselt commercial area has a hinterland of 310,000 people and as such ranks third in Flanders.

The aim of the Hasselt “SAMEN ANDERS MOBIEL” (SAM) CAMPAIGN is to include the Hasselt citizens and visitors in promoting environmental modes of transport with a vast set of goal-oriented actions.

The incoming new political coalition, formed in 1995, put in their manifesto “Hasselt for the people”, a strong focus on various aspects of a citizen oriented transport policy. As a result a "sustainable three-track transport policy" was born. The three tracks are based on urban traffic safety, liveability and transport comfort concerns and goals. These three tracks are seen as equally important.

Track 1: ‘THE LARGER TRANSPORT POLICY’

Policy on framework conditions such as the overall mobility plan, plan for bike policy, plan for parking policy, by pass programme, urban and transport improvements in the railway station surroundings, Groene Boulevard (Green Boulevard), public transport enhancement (including the famous and popular ‘city busses for free’ programme), changes to the outer ring road, etc.

Track 2: ‘THE SMALLER TRANSPORT POLICY’

Quick solutions for residents’ problems such as a parking signposting scheme, traffic calming measures, improved crossings, marked gateways to the city, residential areas with speed restrictions, 30 km/h zone, cycle network improvements including, among others, good and safe infrastructure, guarded and free bike parking, etc.

Track 3: “SAMEN ANDERS MOBIEL”, THE ONGOING CAMPAIGN

As a multi targeted action campaign it supported the overall municipal transport policy with specific actions as mentioned below. The very nature of these actions aimed at visibility on the streets and encouragement of residents to participate.

The SAM-action(s) are meant:

- to fit into Hasselt’s long-term policy of sustainable development;
- to avoid the dangers of a once-only event,

- to be a chain of goal-oriented, often small-scale actions;
- to prioritise the active involvement of target groups (based on ‘good citizenship’),
- to be visible in the city,
- to be spread over time,
- to coordinate actions and services in synergy and across the city departments,
- to benefit from ongoing media coverage (from different angles and for different target groups).

The ‘Anders Mobiel’ (A New Mobility Culture) part of the project mainly covered the promotion of travelling by bike and bus.

The ‘Samen Mobiel’ (Together) covers the collaborative part of this project, based on the concept that there is a greater potential to change travel mode habits if the players involved participate in the actions themselves.

At the start-up of the project in 1997 – 1998, twenty-nine actions were identified and defined. In 2002 some twenty initiatives were covered.

- Eight partner actions ‘Residents’
- Four partner actions ‘Schools’
- Five partner actions ‘City staff and services’
- Three partner actions ‘Companies’
- One partner actions ‘Tourism’

Eight actions are in preparation or postponed.

Target groups

The city wanted to guarantee public involvement in a lasting form of collaborative campaign that has the potential to be structurally included in a long-term sustainable development policy for the city. Using these various targeted actions as hallmarks, SAM is characterised as an ongoing city based campaign with different partners. By its nature, SAM forms a valuable alternative for a single or isolated campaign.

Due to the particular nature of these actions they encourage participation of various groups like residents, shopkeepers, schools, companies, visitors and tourists.

Main actors

The campaign is co-ordinated by the city based SAM secretariat.

A steering group coordinates the actions and creates a synergy in efforts, resources etc. The public transport agency De Lijn is a partner in the steering group. As a starting point it was intended that all heads of the city departments should be members of the steering group so that the projects would be given the back up of their authority.

A working group with representatives of the departments involved is responsible for the operational work. Langzaam Verkeer vzw acted as consultant to support the campaign.

Level of implementation and qualitative assessment

A qualitative assessment of the actions that were implemented was carried out by the campaign secretariat. The results listed below are split up according to target group and

with ratings qualified as ‘very interesting action (++)’, interesting action (+), and actions which are assessed as not interesting

(-): An action is assessed on two criteria: the number of people reached and the investment costs (budget and staff cost).

Partner actions ‘Residents’

More accommodation for bikes ++

Guard service ‘heavy shopping bags’ +

“Shop by Bike and Ring Your Bell ++

Treasure hunt –

SAM banners in the city +

Award for the most environment-friendly person ‘Mobifolie-trophy’ +

White bikes for free ++

Information package ‘Samen Anders Mobiel’ ++

Gifts day for cyclists +

Partner actions ‘Schools’

Bike pools ++

Car-free day ++

Award for the most environment-friendly school ‘Mobifolie-trophy’ +

Car-free school surroundings ++

Partner actions ‘City staff and services’

Service bikes for civil servants ++

Bike compensation action ++

Courier bikes +

Bike repair atelier ++

Car-free day +

Partner actions ‘Companies’

Sam lottery -

Award for most environment-friendly company ‘Mobifolie trophy’ +

Garage owners: Cars in, bikes out +

Partner actions ‘Tourism’

Guided tours by bike for tourists +

Five year after the start of the campaign, SAM has become a well-known concept in and around Hasselt.

The SAM philosophy and attitude has become some ‘cultural’ standard in Hasselt. There is no political entity that still supports travelling by car in the city as a priority. Public transport, cycling and walking is encouraged as much as possible in Hasselt.

The Transport Plan for Hasselt is called: "Hasselt Samen Anders Mobiel".

The partners participate in the initiatives and discuss them.

The SAM concept was dominantly present in the ongoing political debate and at the latest local elections.

The city’s transport policy gained interest from regional, national and international parties.

Funding

The local authority funds the campaign within their regular internal budgets from different departments. Partners do their bit and finance their own activities.

The campaign received co-funding from the EU Life programme for the development and implementation phase 1998 – 2000.

Barriers, opportunities and critical success factors

Internal partnership

- Developing and implementing an effective joint package of campaign activities and services with various departments is always pioneer work. The process of co-operation between departments is always seeking a balance between win-win situations on the one hand and keeping a firm hold on its own particular programme on the other hand.
- With “overlapping service” projects there is always the problem of budget allocation.
- Fear for extra workload and innovation are other threats to the process.
- Cross - over thinking and acting is apparently a difficult step to take!

External partnership

- Residents warmly welcomed the initiatives, partly due to the appealing prizes involved. The city scored especially well with the free guarded bike parking.
- The shop owners were easily willing to participate in the "Shop by Bike and Ring Your Bell" action. The fact that they brought all the retail associations' together less than one umbrella last year facilitated the action. It is also much easier to work with one spokesperson.
- Half of the 23 secondary schools in Hasselt participated in various ways. It requires however a constant effort to keep the schools involved.
- The actions involving the city services and personnel have been reasonably successful. It is easy of course to convince them.
- The involvement of private companies in the ‘SAM’ project meets with occasional success with individual companies. To attract the companies as a group requires a much longer period of preparation with time-consuming personal contact needed.
- The tourism service offers a ‘SAM’ guided bike tour through Hasselt. This action needs to build up the necessary promotion and familiarity, but scored an increasing interest
- A broader forum? In retrospect it would have perhaps been better if the steering group had set up a broader forum. The city administration kept a tight hold on SAM as a global action within the boundaries of its own services. It would probably have been better to create a broader social basis of public support by involving residents groups via their socio-cultural associations directly and to allot them responsibilities for sustainable transport for instance.

As far as the effectiveness in co-operation of external partners in SAM is concerned, the SAM team was unable to draw any one single conclusion. For some actions, the target group took over the initiative (e.g. bike pools); in other cases the city itself had to set an example (service bikes).

A few examples:

Having a bike repair centre available creates a whole range of possibilities for setting up other bike projects such as lending bikes to tourists and maintenance of company bikes, recycling old bikes into “white bikes”, maintenance of all city bikes (including tourist bikes, “white bikes”, courier bikes and company bikes).

The concept 'Shop by Bike and Ring Your Bell' can very easily be carried over into other districts and towns. A manual is currently being written on the concept. During the "Soft Road User Week" 2002, different Flemish councils and towns will start up a common "Shop by Bike and Ring Your Bell" campaign.

The bike pool is an environment-friendly and safe means of transport for children who live within biking distance of their elementary school. The bike pool concept is currently being promoted and started up in the Flemish, Brussels and Walloon regions.

The SAM coordinator believes that these targeted and spread- in – time actions are more important than a "Car Free Day" for instance. Closing a district or street to traffic for one day just to have cars racing through the next day doesn't strike him as very efficient.

3. GENT, campaigning for a liveable city [1] [4]



Promoted topic and priority issues

Gent, as the second largest city of 'Flanders and the third centre in Belgium, is the core city of a metropolitan area of about 500,000 inhabitants. The city itself has 226.000 inhabitants (excluding non residential students). Every day, about 35.000 people commute to Gent.

All these elements make Gent an attractive city and generate considerable levels of traffic from and to the city. Major highways that link Gent with all other important cities in Belgium surround the city. Some of these highways lead directly into the centre of Gent, making it very attractive to reach the city centre by car, and leading to excessive private vehicle usage.

The present modal split (excluding non permanent residential students) is: car 60%, walking 17%, bike 14%, public transport 8%, moped 1%.

Whereas former attempts to pedestrianise the inner city failed, in 1997 the steering policy of the City Council succeeded to introduce the new 'Mobility Plan for the Inner city'.

In order to counter the traffic problems, a number of plans were established. The main features of these plans were:

- no through traffic anymore in the city centre of Ghent (by creating a large pedestrian area and by traffic flow measures);
- pedestrians, cyclists and public transport are given more space, since only few cars are allowed in the city centre;
- traffic calming: apart of the pedestrian area, a speed limit of 30 km/h. has been established between the pedestrian area and the parking route;
- re-designing streets and squares aims at making the city centre more attractive to citizens and visitors;

Target groups and main actors

Within its integrated traffic policy, the city targeted and still targets the city residents, retail and catering sector, visitors and all travel mode users (cyclists in particular) with tailor made information and campaigns both with general information and specific campaign material.

The councillor of transport, backed up by the city council and a strong internal planning and traffic team, and the public and media debate itself on the plans and referenda formed the main actors in the process.

Level of implementation

Part of the city centre has been pedestrianised - an area of some 35 hectares/86 acres and as such the largest car-free centre in Belgium - and in other parts traffic-calming measures were introduced with the creation of a 30 km/h area.

A 'parking route' around the city centre ensures an optimal accessibility and especially to the (underground) parking garages. The city did not support additional parking; all extra parking in parking buildings was compensated for by the reduction of on street parking.

By far, the most important measure was to keep through-traffic out of the city centre. This traffic must now make use of the city's ring road and the P-route (parking route). Signs along the ring road indicate which car parks are nearby and how many spaces are still available in them. When you follow these signs you automatically end up on the P-route.

The decision process anticipating the new traffic policy (1997) was characterised by steering and firm standpoints of the City Council and the counsellor of transport in particular. The City heavily leaned on political commitment and on policy communication and campaign techniques to get the support of the public in general and of the retail sector in particular. Also two referenda were organised: one on the role of public transport and one on a new underground parking (which was rejected).

Once the Council had taken the decisions, a campaign was commissioned to facilitate the implementation (from 1997 on). The campaign targeted the various issues and groups involved by means of a broad set of communication techniques:

- Brochure and full colour map with the new circulation scheme, including P routes;
- Website;
- Targeted and specific information initiatives in various local media and at crossroads,
- One extra campaign and action targeting shopping 'Gent koopstad ' or 'Gent, city for buying?';
- The Mobiliteitsgids, an informative and handsome booklet for every citizen;

- Public transport promotion and materials: map, leaflets, special actions with PT for free children under the age of 15, free new years eve busses, and recently free nightbusses.
- Cycling promotion and materials: cycle network map, cycle theft prevention, 'Gent fietst'- leaflet, 'the cycling student'- leaflet, other (a set of about 30 initiatives from 1998 to 2002);
- Leaflets about the new pedestrianised zone;
- Creative participation in Car free Day initiative;
- Demonstrations with intelligent speed adaptation devices
- ...

The traffic plans have been the framework for a large number of completing mobility management actions, which focus on increasing awareness about travel behaviour and sustainable modes.

A first series of mobility management measures concern the bicycle.

The city promotes actively the use of the bicycle. One of the key ideas is to remind inhabitants of the 'existence' of the bicycle at crucial life stages. Young people and their parents are here the prime target groups.

- from 2002 on each 3 years old receives a bicycle helmet. At this stage children start to go to kindergarten and the city wants to remind parents this does not automatically means a car trip.
- At the age of 12, the youngsters receive a 'reflecting' jacket and a bracelet together with some bicycle tips.

The city organises each years a number of events for bicyclists. Some examples during the last years include:

- evening bicycle tour that attracted 500 to 600 cyclists and focused on the importance of good bicycle lighting;
- breakfast for bicyclist, where more than 500 cyclists were offered a coffee and pastries;
- a 'search' cyclist tour, where the city wanted cyclists to discover the possibilities of recreational touring around the city;
- a second bicycle market, focusing on children's bikes.

Other bicycle initiatives are:

- One of the disadvantages of a successful bicycle policy is that you get complaints about nuisances and hindrances caused by bicycles. Some of these complaints concern the abandon of bicycle 'wrecks' on the pavement, obstruction by bikes, bicycle theft, etc. Therefore a bicycle guard was created (at present 5 people, in the near future 10 persons), that have to combat these nuisances.
- Bicycles in bad repair are labelled and if they are still on the pavement after 14 days they are removed to the storage facility. During the last year 2625 bicycles were handled, 1364 of which were effectively removed.
- Victims of bicycle theft can visit this storage facility in order to identify their bike. We were able to restore 98 bicycles to their owner in this way.
- In order to prevent theft, bicycles are also 'engraved' with a personal number that is unique for every individual. Gent started this initiative in 1995 and about 32.000 bicycles are treated, an estimated 22% of all bicycles in Ghent.

Public transport

The city promotes the use of public transport especially at peak times, e.g. during events and peak shopping periods.

- Gent had for a number of years a free 'shopping bus' that linked an outside P&R area with the city centre. This free shuttle ran on Saturdays every 10 minutes, from noon to 7 a.m. Still it was only really successful on the extremely busy days (Christmas Period, Sales). Moreover it was criticised for being free, while 'regular' public transport users had to pay on the 'normal' buses and trams. Therefore it was replaced by free public transport for all during all Saturdays and shopping Sundays of the month of December. The public transport company estimated this caused a doubling in the use of public transport during the days concerned. A rough 15 to 20% were former car users.
- Moreover the first Saturday of each month is also for free, as well as public transport on special days, like the Car Free Day.
- Another initiative is targeted to young people. Since 1999 the 6-11 travel for free on regional and urban public transport. The present city councillor has prolonged this free public transport to the 12 to 14 years old. The city pays about 600.000 Euro to the public transport company in order to obtain this free public transport for its youngsters. This measure resulted in approx. a 30% increase in public transport use in this target group.

The city's personnel

The city itself has to set the example. Therefore the city took a number of initiatives to promote the use of the sustainable modes amongst its employees. The most important measures are:

- a bicycle bonus of 0,15 Euro/km. with a maximum of 10 km. a day.
- the same amount is given to people that walk to their job or people that use public transport and cannot benefit of other advantageous fares.
- good bicycle facilities at the work places (e.g. underground storage facility with electronic access in the main administrative building).
- the possibility to get an own bicycle for commuting (company bike). These bicycles are assembled from older bicycles or are even newly purchased. In 2002 about 400 employees have such a bike. They do not get the bicycle bonus, since they have a bike from the city. Over 350 employees have such a 'company bike'.
- for 'business' journeys, the city has a number of bikes that can be used by the employees;
- finally, employees wanting a parking place in the underground parking lot of the administrative centre, have to pay a symbolic fee of 0,75 Euro/day.

Building partnerships

The city has established a number of partnerships in order to initiate some mobility management initiatives.

- The most important one is the establishment of a non-profit association to let bicycles to students. This association is established by the city, the university and two polytechnics. The aim is to let bicycles to students. In 2002 about 200 bicycles were rented out. In 2003 about 500 bicycles should be operational and in the end the association should be able to hire out about 2000 bicycles.
- Secondly the city promotes Green Travel plan for schools. A consultancy firm is hired, that draws up such a plan, in close collaboration with the school. In return, the city, or the region (if regional roads are involved) commits itself to put in some infrastructure measures, such as speed humps or similar devices.

Funding

The funds Gent spent for its promotional and communication initiatives for its transport policy are estimated to range between 231.000 € (1997), 281.000 €: (2000) and 169.000€ (2003). The budget is decreasing due to the fact that some of the materials can be updated.

Barriers, opportunities and critical success factors

The political challenge was characterised by delicate balance between the traditional needs of the retail and catering sector in the centre and the needs of the inhabitants and by convincing personal commitment and efforts. The firm line of the counsellor of transport, backed up by the City Council and a strong internal administrative team, and the public and media debate itself resulting from the plans and referenda formed the main actors in the process. Leadership and commitment, however, were the keywords in Gent.

Gent has definitely established a campaigning culture for sustainable mobility, which is totally integrated within the steering framework of the mobility planning and public works administration, consequently integrated in the internal organisation and budgeting.

Statistical data

Three surveys were carried out with the following results:

- Increase of 26% visitors of the city centre in 1998 versus 1995 (Independent survey in Belgian cities).
- Increase of 33% usage of off street parking in 1998 versus 1997
- Significant increased usage of the Winkelbus (shopping bus), which links the surrounding municipalities with the city centre.

A travel survey is being carried out.

4. Partnerships with SCHOOLS: the Tapestry cases of GEEL and Mol [5]



Definition of the Problem

Within the framework of the mobility covenant programme, Geel and Mol (two regional town up to 30000 inhabitants each, Province of Antwerp) entered a partnership with the schools, their 5000 pupils, parents, teachers and headmasters. Mol 13 of the 16 schools; Geel 12 of the 25 schools joined the programme.

Both cases can be characterised as strongly embedded in a local mobility planning process, which evoked a vivid interaction with local partners. The project resulted in an average of 10% mode shift amongst the pupils towards walking, cycling and bus.

In the past, there was a partition between the city's traffic policy and the schools in the way they deal with traffic problems. The municipality dealt with traffic matters, while schools were involved in traffic education, mainly focussed on knowledge aspects (e.g. 'traffic rules') rather than on attitude or behavioural aspects (e.g. what is my own responsibility towards sustainable mobility)

Regularly the feeling emerged that the large efforts did not produce enough results: school surroundings stayed unsafe because of car traffic, amongst them parents. Both the schools and the municipal traffic administration felt the need to experience a more targeted and structural school traffic & travel package action plan.

Method chosen to address the problem

Main drive became a new, integrated approach based on a partnership between municipality and schools. The communication and school campaigning became part of the policy supporting measures within the overall local covenant programme.

Each participating school involved in the assessment part could decide an operational target , however, a 5 % reduction in the number of pupils of age 9-12 driven to school by the end of the campaign was the set as a minimum target. .

The tools used in the campaign-implementation actions are the following.

- A popularised version of the mobility plan designed in a powerpoint presentation and made available for open forums
- A commitment declaration to be signed by participating schools
- Free package of educational materials to work with in the schools
- A demonstration day 'teach the teacher' to work with new educational goals in a more structural oriented method
- Revising and spreading a new leaflet to stimulate cycling by safe networks
- Production of 7 green school travel plans
- Elaboration of a traffic educating route
- Rounding off Tapestry 'projectweek' as a final integrated action programme with a car free schooldag, traffic event with free gadgets ,stage performances , the inauguration of a new traffic education centre , education and awarenessraising actions on a school level

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