European Commission

Just Transition Platform – Policy approach:

KARDITSA – ACHIEVING BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE TOWARDS CYCLING & SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

Greece, Municipality of Karditsa

This document is part of a series presenting information and lessons learned on policy approaches at national, regional or local level supporting a just transition to a climate-neutral economy. The Just Transition Platform (JTP) assists EU Member States and regions to unlock the support in this transition. Visit the JTP website: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/just-transition-fund/just-transition-platform_en

Region:
Municipality of Karditsa

Sector:
Transportation

National funding:[1]
€75.3 million

EU funding:[2]

ERDF/ESF 2014-2020:
€301.4 million

Duration:
2000 – present

Responsible Managing Authority/Agency:
Municipality of Karditsa

Summary

Since 2000, Karditsa in Greece has developed a series of policies and activities designed to increase accessibility and put sustainable mobility at the forefront of the city's design in order to ensure green transition. A city with approximately 40 000 residents, committed to achieving complete sustainability, identified mobility as a crucial factor in realising this objective. The approach encompasses various policies, activities, management, and promotional activities which have led to a significant reduction in the use of cars in the city and increased the number of trips made by bicycle, for which the city has won international recognition for its approach and subsequent impact. The city known in particular for its cycling infrastructure and culture is commonly known as the 'Cycling City of Greece', and claims the honour of being certified as the first 'Cycling Friendly Employer' in Greece.

The city has adopted an approach to sustainable mobility that takes into account urban planning, mobility planning, sustainability, health, tourism, and well-being elements and is based on multimodal mobility to facilitate smooth transfers between modes of transportation in and around the city. This approach holds people at its core, from participatory processes in the design of the policies to engagement and promotion of different initiatives and activities to ensure the awareness and adoption of more sustainable habits by the region's inhabitants.

1 This is the total amount of funding for the Thessaly region from the national government's contribution to the ERDF/ESF for the 2014-2020 programming period, which funds a variety of initiatives across the region, including a portion of which goes towards developing cycling infrastructure and the sustainable mobility network in Karditsa.
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Regional and Urban Policy

Type of policy measure/activities:

The range of activities adopted as part of this approach includes both temporary and permanent policy measures, infrastructure development, awareness-raising, and management. In 2020, the speed limit within the city was reduced to 30 km/hour, making the roads safer for all, and making motorised vehicles a less desirable option for trips within the city, compared to alternatives such as one or a combination of cycling, taking public transit, and walking.

New infrastructures implemented include:

- Building cycle lanes,
- Installing secure bicycle storage containers at the bus station,
- Installing bicycle racks on buses,
- Implementing a bicycle-sharing network,
- Installing free charging stations for electric cars, and
- Creating a car-pooling initiative supported by the municipality.

Karditsa has also introduced rewards for individuals, such as municipal employees who can benefit from the use of a free bicycle or get extra leave for choosing sustainable transportation options, and for companies who adopt sustainable mobility choices, they can receive a 20 % cut on municipal taxes. To increase community interest and support, the city has designed one-off and ongoing activities to engage with citizens around sustainable mobility including street festivals, car-free days, and artwork across the city placed strategically to increase children's and pedestrians' safety.

Goals and approach:

The driving force behind the transition process towards sustainable mobility in Karditsa lies in addressing congestion, improving air quality, and prioritising people-centric urban design. The initial policy focused on constructing cycling paths to encourage bicycle usage, contributing to the city's sustainable mobility initiative. Rather than solely targeting vehicular reduction for congestion alleviation, the approach envisioned vibrant, socially active local and central areas to enhance citizens' quality of life. While congestion reduction remained a goal, the emphasis shifted towards community well-being, steering away from a vehicle-centric focus.

In embracing a just transition, the policy approach extends beyond top-down urban planning by following a people-centric approach. Through prioritising sustainable mobility, vibrant communal spaces, and inclusive citizen engagement, the city ensured that the transition is not only environmentally conscious but also socially equitable. This multifaceted approach addressed the diverse needs of its residents, showcasing the city's dedication to a just and balanced urban evolution. The initiative stands as a practical model for positive change, promoting a greener and more sustainable future for the entire community.

Important outputs, results or achievements:

The significant impact of the policies on shifting the functioning and culture of the city has shaped its identity as a 'cycling city' and a model for sustainable mobility that puts people at the core of its design. Since the city began implementing its sustainable mobility policies, there has been an increase in bicycle users and a significant decrease in the number of cars in the city centre, with a notable shift in the character of the city. Cycling has become an inseparable part of the city's identity, with the city having transformed its branding and tourism to focus on its cycling culture.

Some figures to highlight the municipality's achievements since the launch of this policy are:

- 7.5 km of cycling paths in the urban core, with 10 km of cycling paths in the greater urban core;
- 40 % of all journeys in the city are completed by bicycle; and
- ~20 000 bicycles in the city (equivalent to one for every two inhabitants).

The modal share of cycling within urban transportation varies significantly across the EU. When looking at the data on capital cities, we can contrast the 2 % share in Athens, with the leading cities of Copenhagen with 49 % and 35 % in Amsterdam.

This exemplifies the position of Karditsa as a leader for other Greek cities when it comes to cycling.

The success of the city's sustainable mobility approach, and in particular its policies (and their impact) on cycling have been recognised nationally and internationally including receiving the national Best City Awards 2018 silver medal, and the European Mobility Week Award 2019 for smaller municipalities.

Scalability[3] and transferability[4]:

Karditsa's policy approach to sustainable mobility and the associated behavioural change in society is one from which some elements could be transferable to other cities and contexts. Given the nature of the approach, as a series of policies with varying lengths of implementation, complemented by one-time and recurring activities to further engage citizens in their communities and encourage uptake of sustainable mobility options. Other cities and regions are likely facing similar challenges around congested traffic and poor air quality and could adapt some of the core elements of this approach, such as participatory citizen engagement, multimodal mobility, a cross-sectoral approach to policymaking, and strong associated promotional efforts to their context.

This approach is scalable to some extent, however, given the municipality's geographical conditions, a similar approach on a larger scale would require a notably larger percentage of resources and investment to provide the same relative level of coverage.

3 Scalability entails that a policy approach can be adapted to a bigger scale than just the local context.
4 Transferability entails that a policy approach can be applicable to a similar setting and replicated.

Key success factors and lessons learnt:

The development of this approach as cross-cutting through various departments is one of the factors that has contributed to its success. By connecting mobility-related policies and investments to other administrative areas, such as urban development, health, environment and sustainability, and tourism, this approach has become integrated and ingrained into all aspects of the city and its decision-making. When developing policies across sectors, mobility, sustainability, and the well-being of citizens are taken into account.

The implementation of this policy has occurred across four different municipal administrations, thus the success of it can be attributed to the continuous efforts and new policies adopted under each administration.

The city's geography has likely contributed to its ability to adopt cycling so expansively, given the flat terrain and compact nature of the city. This facilitated the need for infrastructure to only need to be developed over a relatively small area in order to reach the majority of the population.

Key challenges:

With this policy approach, one challenge is developing a good balance of short- and long-term policies for this approach of integrated sustainable mobility. While the city does develop long-term policies, the majority focus on short and medium-term actions. More focus on the broader vision and long-term direction of the city's mobility approach would ensure a cohesive approach across administrations. This would also ensure that the municipality is ready to apply to new funding opportunities and be proactive in shaping their vision for the city, and avoid the common practice of implementing new initiatives only in response to time-sensitive funding opportunities.

Central framework conditions[5]:

Karditsa is a small city located in the rural Thessaly region in Central Greece, with a population of around 40 000. A defining feature of the city is its flat terrain and compact nature, as it spans only 3.5 km in diameter.

Given that the municipality's economy is primarily based on agriculture and tourism, there is a long history of people-centric development. This includes all inhabitants, with the city undertaking specific efforts to ensure the needs of the Roma communities, asylum seekers and refugees, seasonal workers, and persons with a disability are taken into account when developing policies and initiatives.

Outlook:

The city has committed to making a strong effort to be climate-neutral by 2030. The continued implementation, and further expansion of this sustainable mobility approach, designed around citizen engagement and uptake will be a key policy element that would make this goal possible. In the coming years, the municipality will continue to expand the provision of sustainable mobility options and improve the interconnectedness between services to facilitate more cohesive transfer between modes of transportation across the city and with the surrounding region.

Karditsa's next mobility project will be the €440 000 project to create a new 2.5 km cycling lane at Sarantaporou and Dimitriou streets, which will feature a bright red, separated lane with added glass studs and solar light reflectors for enhanced safety.

5 Framework conditions encompass the institutional, informational and socio-economic factors that determine a given environment (contextual information), e.g. market conditions, access to finance, tax regulation, infrastructure and support.

Partners & contacts:

Municipality of Karditsa

Website / social media:

https://dimoskarditsas.gov.gr/en/

Sources:

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