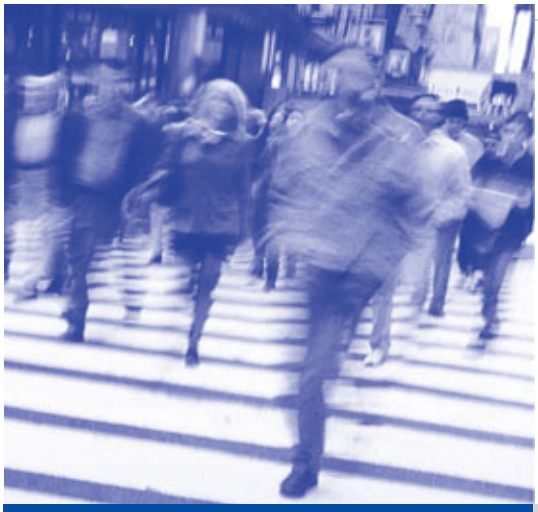

SUITS

SIA Research Survey 2020

SIA Research Report 2020

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CIVITAS 2020
Cleaner and better transport in cities
S U I T S

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Abstract

This report builds on earlier research into Social Impact Assessment (SIA) carried out in 2017, to understand the level of common understanding about SIA and its application to sustainable transport measures,[1] amongst the SUITS team and other related projects. In summer 2020 a second piece of research was carried out to discover how 'social impact assessment' and 'social impact' in general was viewed across a wider range of practitioners, outside the project team itself. This took the form of 21 in-depth interviews (across 7 countries) to gather perceptions of social impact assessment and related social equity issues of transport.

Participants with greater experience of SIA generally felt that it could and should be taken further both in SUMP and in planning individual measures. The least experienced participants showed some awareness of SIA and its importance, despite their lack of direct experience with it. It was generally felt there had been a growing shift in emphasis towards appreciating the social impact of transport, helped by a growing awareness in society on climate change and environmental issues, with awareness of social impacts further heightened by the pandemic.

The level of citizen participation during SUMP planning had been a positive experience for participants but had also raised awareness that assessing social impact and involving citizens in planning could be done better. Improving the level and inclusivity of consultation is crucial to gaining better exchange of views with wider public participation and improved information-sharing to inform decision-making. Social Impact Assessment is an important part of planning which could become the focus for better ongoing citizen engagement and reducing transport poverty.

Project Partners

Organisation	Country	Abbreviation
Coventry University Leading	UK	Cov Uni

Document History

Date	Person	Action	Status	Diss. Level

[1] https://www.suits-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Social-Impact-Asessment-Report.pdf

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Dissemination Level: PC = Project Coordinator, SC=Site Coordinator, TC=Technical Coordinator, EM=Evaluation Manager.

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1 Executive Summary

This piece of research follows on from a survey carried out as part of Work package 7.3 in 2017, to understand the level of common understanding of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) amongst the SUITS team and other related projects on the application of SIA to sustainable transport measures,[2] (Woodcock, 2018). In summer 2020 a second piece of research was carried out to discover how 'social impact assessment' and 'social impact' in general was viewed across a wider range of practitioners, outside the project team itself. This took the form of in-depth interviews by Coventry University and our SUITS partners using in-depth questions about social impact assessment and related social equity issues of transport. The interview transcripts were then analysed using a thematic analysis approach and manually coded using QSR International's NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software.

1.1 Participants

The exercise drew on responses from 21 participants covering 7 countries (Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Germany, Ireland, UK). These covered a broad range of experience and roles, including transport policy officers and planners, urban and traffic planners, freight and logistics management and operations, analysts and researchers, transport consultants, a director of an NGO, a professional in corporate social responsibility and a public health professional. There were 11 men and 10 women, mostly in senior career roles, but 3 were in the 21-30 age-group, so in early to mid-career. The sector and experience of all participants ranged from Local Authorities (LAs), to transport operators, Logistics companies, Engineering companies, and NGO's.

The majority had some experience with SIA, either participating in assessments or using the output, although 7 had no direct experience, and a further 4 quite limited direct experience. Those with least experience were those involved in logistics/freight. They nonetheless had opinions concerning social impacts of sustainable transport, but there was often a divergence of opinion between the more experienced and these less experienced participants.

1.2 Social equity considerations in transport planning

The more experienced participants were rather cynical and pointed to many ways in which SUMPS and master plans were *lacking* in consideration of issues of social equity, while the least experienced either said they did not know or were optimistic – commenting that awareness of social equity needs had grown. Among the experts, it was felt that social equity was more likely to be considered in the public sector than in the private one (e.g., private housing developments). Even in the public sector social equity could still just be a 'box-ticking' exercise and although LAs did good work on social equity in general, the relevant departments were often not joined up and not consulted. The point of view of the least experienced group was in contrast with this – they felt that social equity issues *are* considered in SUMP and are translated into practise as providing access for a range of

[2] https://www.suits-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Social-Impact-Asessment-Report.pdf

different users with different needs when planning transport services and that awareness of such issues had increased. It was commented that there was variety from place to place – such that some cities had this issue on their political agendas, and it was pushed accordingly. This variety was echoed by experts who had worked across a range of organisations and LAs – that political agendas were of influence in raising the priority of social impacts in planning.

1.3 Factors in SIA

We asked what factors are considered in their experience of SIA and which were most important to go forward. The most frequently mentioned answer was broadly 'environmental factors' – which although not strictly a 'social' factor was generally mentioned in connection with the link between transport and health and providing equity for deprived groups, whether they lived in inner-city areas, or in more remote low-income districts. It was difficult to separate out the influence of the COVID 19 lockdown on our participants' opinions – but overall 'air quality', with noise was felt to be of increasing importance to quality of life (and not just to health). There were also emerging themes about lower income groups, greater accessibility for people with disabilities, and enabling independent travel for children and older people. A further emergent theme was the need to provide better travel equity for people living in deprived areas, on lower incomes and particularly in housing areas more remote from the city, which were not well-connected by public transport. A further factor mentioned was that young people on lower incomes needed better transport equity to allow them to have better employment opportunities.

1.4 Gathering information and public participation

It was widely suggested that the appropriate bodies to collect travel needs and social impact data were the LAs and transport departments, with occasional assistance from experts or academia. There was knowledge among our 'expert' participants that much data could be gathered through use of digital media such as questionnaires through mass surveys or participation through online fora and portals, but also without needing direct participation, through info-mobility apps providing data on travel patterns from usage data and 'big data'.

On the other hand, participants pointed out the value of direct participation and co-creation, 'getting people round a table' and stakeholder engagement, although it was felt to be a challenge to move beyond consulting with 'special interest groups' towards wider participation of citizens in formulating solutions. The more experienced participants in our survey frequently pointed out the pitfalls of mere 'consultation' with interest groups, which could easily exclude many people, and particularly those in 'hard to reach' groups.

1.5 How this influenced decisions

The experts in our study also emphasised that despite best efforts at participative consultation, and basing plans on wide information, decisions were ultimately often political as to what groups were targeted for spending and how resources were distributed. Changing the mindsets of some of the political decision makers was viewed as an important part of furthering social equity in transport outcomes. Unfortunately, these mindsets could often lag behind what local officers on the ground observed as 'needs'.

Some of our participants were proud of the level of public participation that had occurred during SUMP which was viewed as an improvement over earlier levels. These were from cities that had been involved in a wider range of citizen participation activities (e.g., Rome) than they had been previously. Other contributors were more cynical, emphasising the barriers to inclusive participation, and an awareness of the difficulties involved in getting timing, location and nature of the engagement targeted at a wide range of people. A large number of ways to improve involvement were mentioned, not least of which was the buy-in of the Mayor, to secure funding for activities and skills development.

1.6 Had there been a shift in thinking about Social impact and SIA?

Participants generally considered there had been a shift in thinking. The participants more experienced in focusing on social impact commented on a growing awareness among the public about sustainability and transport and its social implications. This was linked particularly to awareness of climate change issues, but also to growing awareness of health issues such as obesity and emissions or pollution. This growing awareness of the social impact of transport was viewed as incidental to the growing campaigns globally about climate and health.

However, opinions also emphasised there was a long way to go. There was some concern that politicians were always lagging behind citizens in these shifts. It was suggested by many of our participants that the pandemic lockdowns had accelerated a growth in awareness in the short term, about the importance of transport, its link with quality of life, health and lower emissions – but would it continue?

One comment suggested that transport experts had always been aware of these things – so where was the shift in thinking? From all the views we collected, it seems at least likely that SIA will be easier to justify in future planning activities and that experts can point to a groundswell of public opinion which might prove a more fertile ground for promoting change, and securing citizen engagement. It was also noted by some participants that the Media had gained a greater awareness and interest in the social (and environmental) impacts of transport during the lockdowns and that they hoped for greater interest and more informed and sustainability-focused reporting in future.

1.7 Conclusions

The social impact of transport is a key and growing area of concern and participants had observed a growing awareness among the public about ‘sustainability and transport’ and its social implications.

The pandemic and its observed effects had accelerated a shift in thinking that had begun earlier, towards a focus on people’s needs and quality of life, by implication moving away from older models of transport that had focused on just the economic needs of mobility.

The majority of our respondents, (and importantly this included those ‘less experienced’) observed there was a need to improve at citizen engagement in transport planning, such as being more inclusive, maintaining a dialogue of continuous feedback and finding ways to overcome the many barriers to citizen involvement. The level of citizen participation elicited

during SUMP planning had been a positive experience for some but had also raised awareness that assessing social impact and involving citizens in planning could be done better.

We recommend that SIA has the potential to be transformed from a transport-planning tool to one that engages people and can be used as a tool to reduce transport poverty in line with integrated master plans.

There is a clear opportunity to use and design participatory activities around SIA, and to use this in the wider context of urban transport planning – linking transport to environmental, health, social and economic master plans, and playing a greater part in all stages of the SUMP process. SUMP provides the structure for continuous feedback and improvement, engaging in participatory activities as part of a continuous SIA process, through participatory feedback and co-creation of new solutions, in terms of assessing social impacts and continuing strategies to reduce transport poverty. These findings build on those of earlier work carried out during the SUITS project in the field of social impact assessment (Woodcock, 2018, 2019 and Woodcock et al, 2020).

2 Main Report

2.1 Introduction & Methodology

This piece of research follows on from a survey carried out by SUITS in 2017, to understand the level of common understanding of SIA amongst the SUITS team and other related projects on the application of SIA to sustainable transport measures.[3] The report of that work presented the current debates around SIA and measurement approaches applied to sustainable transport, especially in terms of the breadth of the criteria used for assessment and the reliance on quantification and the role of citizen engagement. It focused on the relationship between transport innovation and new mobility paradigms, and how there has been a shift in thinking about the relationship between transport and quality of life.

In summer 2020 a follow-on piece of research was carried out across a wider range of practitioners than in our first survey, with a goal of discovering how 'social impact assessment' and 'social impact' in transport planning was viewed across this *wider group*. This survey took the form of qualitative interviews featuring in-depth questions about social impact assessment in the context of sustainable transport measures and SUMPS. The interview transcripts were then analysed using a thematic analysis approach and manually coded using QSR International's NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software.

[3] https://www.suits-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Social-Impact-Asessment-Report.pdf

Participants

The exercise drew on responses from 21 participants covering 7 countries (Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Germany, Ireland, UK). These covered a broad range of experience and roles, including transport policy officers and planners, urban and traffic planners, freight and logistics management and operations, analysts and researchers, transport consultants, a director of an NGO, officers in corporate social responsibility, and public health professionals. The participants were comprised of 11 men and 10 women, mostly in senior career roles, but 3 were in the 21-30 age-group, so in early to mid-career. The sector and experience of all participants ranged from Local Authorities, to transport operators, Logistics companies, Engineering companies, and NGO's. Table 1 shows the background and related interests of our 21 participants.

Table 1. Background of 21 participants

Role	Organisational Experience	Related interests
Director of public health	Local Authority	Sustainable transport generally
Academic research	Government & LAs, charities, 3rd sector, NGOs, logistics, operations	Ageing & transport
Senior policy officer	LA, Transport Authority	Relationship of transport policy to other areas such as land use, health, economic development
Policy officer	LA, Transport Authority	Social transport policy and equality
Transport planner	Engineering company, Local Authorities, Government agency/company	Environmental aspects of highways
Transport planner	Engineering company, local government	
Transport planner, bus operator	Bus operator, public transport	
Municipal planning and development	Operations management	Pedestrian mobility
Head of packed goods transport	Freight company, operations management up to last mile	
Logistics manager (freight)	Freight transport company	

Operations manager (bulk liquid)	Freight logistics company	
Corporate social responsibility in city public transport company	City public transport company, charities	
Co-director of NGO, economist & urban analyst	NGOs, cooperative organisation	Urban mobility, social impact of transport, inclusivity
Solution & technology director, software company, GIS solutions	Software company in GIS, Transport industry companies, railways, port authorities, airports, mobility agencies, City Public Transport operator	Standards, and data
City Mobility Agency, external & international cooperation	City Transport agency, charity groups	Innovation, SUMP, sustainability and innovation
Freelance consultant in transport field	Public transport passenger	
Head of city economic development department	Local authority, urban development	mobility
City planner	Public sector, public participation, legal, ethics, PR, transport management	Older people mobility, environmental impacts, land use
Project manager, urban mobility, competence centre for urban mobility of federal state	Consulting to Local Authorities, municipalities, freight transport, SUMP	
Traffic planner, freelance, working nationwide	Local authorities, municipalities, ministries, regional associations, state administrations	Near-mobility focus on walking and cycling and concepts & strategies
Administration officer, city council	Local authority, council, national travel plans for school and workplaces/campus	Sustainable mobility, behaviour change

Table 1: Background of interview participants

The majority had some experience with SIA, either through participating in assessments or using the output of assessments, although 7 had no direct experience, and a further 4 had quite limited direct experience. Those with the least experience were those involved in

logistics/freight and managing direct operations. They nonetheless had opinions concerning social impacts of sustainable transport, but there was often a divergence of opinion between the more experienced and these less experienced participants. Figure 1 shows the participants' levels of experience and understanding about SIA, on a comparative grid indicating the spread of experience of SIA and understanding of its concepts, (each box represents a participant).

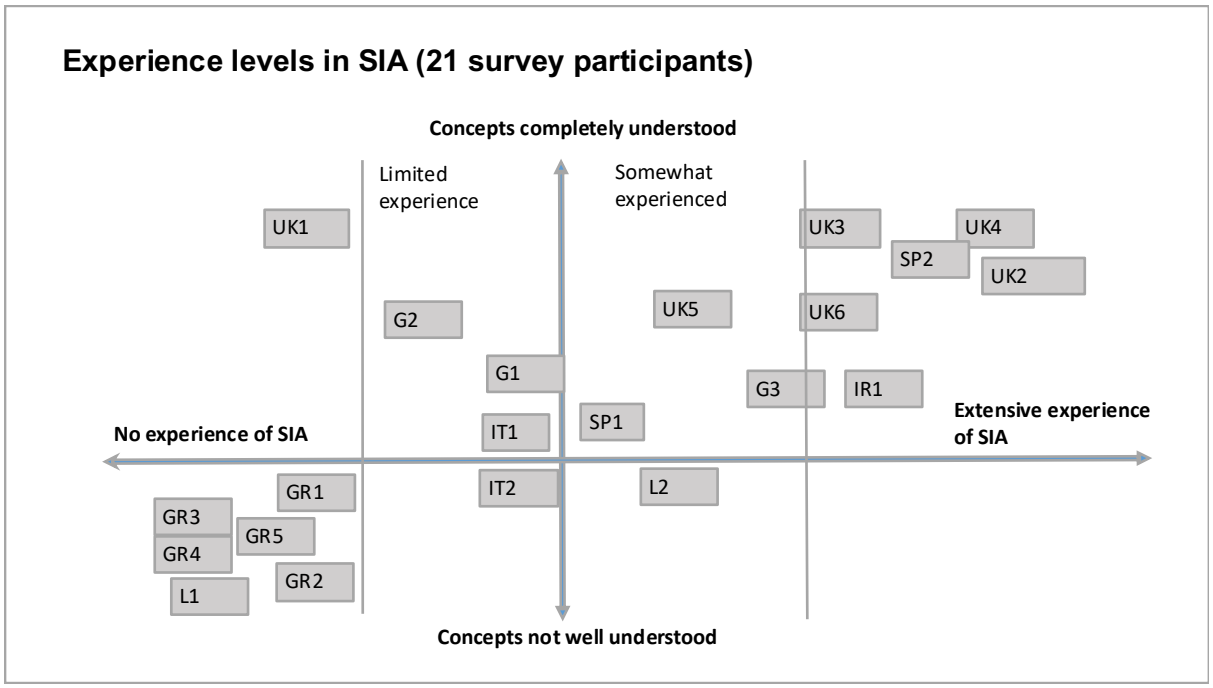

Figure 1: Levels of Experience in Social Impact Assessment of the survey participants

The participants were asked a direct question about their level of experience with SIA. There was an even spread from those with little or no experience in assessment to a small group with extensive experience. Similarly, there was a mixed spread of knowledge and understanding about SIA concepts. The latter was a matter of judgment by the analyst, on reading the interview transcripts.

Those with little knowledge about SIA or little work experience of it, sometimes provided very brief textbook answers to questions which may have come from a training exercise (and at least indicated the concepts had been encountered). However, they also gave other opinions during the interview which showed an overall understanding of the 'social impact' issues and an interest in them. Where opinions differed related to participants' experience, we have noted this in our analysis.

2.2 Social equity considerations in planning sustainable transport

We asked two related questions: *In your experience, to what extent do you think issues of social equity are considered in the development of SUMPS or master plans, or implementation of sustainable transport measures*? and a second question: "*How do you think sustainable transport measures affect different groups in your city?*"

The more experienced participants were rather cynical and pointed to many ways in which SUMPS and master plans were *lacking* in consideration of issues of social equity. It was commented that while a few SUMPS included social equity aspects, overall they were more oriented to sustainability and less to equity. [SP2][4] A further comment suggested that social equity was more likely to be considered in the public sector than the private one (e.g. private housing developments), although even in the public sector social equity was often still just a 'box-ticking' exercise. Although LAs did good work on social equality in some respects, the relevant departments were often not joined up and not consulted across different policy areas. [UK3]

There were however some opinions pointing to signs of change – a recognition of a need to look 'beyond the transport policies to other areas that we need to bring together' cited variously as education, land use, health and housing, to expand the somewhat 'modal' view of the public sector beyond solutions related only to public transport. [UK3, UK2]

The point of view of the least experienced group was in contrast with this – the least experienced either said they did not know how social equity issues were considered or were optimistic – commenting that awareness of social equity needs had grown. They felt that social equity issues *are* considered in SUMP and are translated into practise as providing access for a range of different users with different needs when planning transport service and that awareness of such issues had increased. It was commented that there was variety from place to place – such that some cities had this issue on their political agenda, and it was pushed accordingly. This variety was echoed by experts who had worked across a range of organisations and LAs – that political agendas were of influence in raising the priority of social impacts in planning. The Mayor or a regional government agenda could be particularly influential here. [UK2]

"This varies from client to client…In cities where this already plays a major role, it is usually promoted by very committed equal opportunities officers… There are individual cities where the issue is on the political agenda and is pushed accordingly" [G3]

2.3 How this affected different groups

Participants also volunteered their opinions about how sustainable travel measures impacted different groups in particular. The following groups were identified: gender, age groups, people with disabilities (physical and cognitive) and deprived communities. It was also recognised that some 'interest groups' could be identified which had competing interests in terms of sustainable travel.

Interestingly only one participant (from the UK) mentioned 'social class' specifically as an indicator of how transport affected different groups, other respondents used broader categorisations such as deprived groups, low income, ethnicity (BAME).

Gender

[4] The alpha-numerics 'SP2, UK1', etc. relate to comments from our participants and sometimes quotes.

Gender was mentioned specifically in relation to driving of a 'family' car by the man, and hence women were more likely to be using public transport (PT), with consequent personal safety concerns, and in addition the need for safer cycling to empower mobility of women and children, and greater encouragement to women to take up innovative active modes such as e-scooters. [UK4, SP2, UK1]. UK West Midlands participants mentioned a specific project, 'Team Go' in relation to gender and e-scooter take-up in their region [UK4]. Another participant (who had specific interests in gender issues) suggested that Gender was not sufficiently addressed in the SUMP process, but this was not a widespread comment.

"The measures are not constructed with preliminary gender impact analysis. For example, if you want to increase women's participation in active mode transport, you need to segregate the lanes (a gender perspective is necessary, security and perception of security is needed)" [SP2]

Age – children, young adults and older people

Several respondents mentioned that children's independent mobility needed to be considered, [IR1, SP1, SP2, G3, UK3].

Elders were clearly seen as a distinct group with specific transport needs, ranging from public transport catering for persons with limited mobility and providing access to leisure facilities, i.e. not commuting. One expert commented that seniors put very different values on things such as travel time and were not needing the same kinds of routes as commuters. Pedestrianisation and traffic calming was seen to benefit this group in particular [e.g. IT1, GR1, G3, L1]

"Older people and people with reduced mobility are particularly affected. Sensible pedestrian traffic planning includes the issue of accessibility and the creation of places to stay and sit, as well as local shopping facilities, etc. The main aim here is to extend the radius of action of older people and people with reduced mobility", [G3].

Several UK respondents highlighted that transport equity was a big issue for young adults who may be prevented from taking up opportunities because of high public transport costs.

Accessibility

Ensuring 'accessibility for all', was mentioned as a major factor by most participants, with very different levels of depth ranging from expert knowledge to a simpler appreciation of the need for it. In respect to accessibility, participants mentioned people with limited mobility and elderly people as well as people with 'special mobility needs' and cognitive impairment.

Deprived communities on the periphery of urban areas

A theme coming to the fore strongly when talking about social groupings was that of 'deprived communities' living in deprived locations, which included 'remote' communities on the outskirts of cities, with poor public transport, few 'sustainable' options for access to work and city facilities, with implications for low-income residents who had moved out of the city in search of affordable housing. For respondents with a UK background (6 in our survey) the

precise meaning of 'deprived' was connected to a government index of neighbourhood deprivation, the 'Index of Multiple Deprivation' (IMD)[5].

"I think deprivation is a really good indicator that we look at a lot, IMD, because it brings in a number of facets together that brings together information on what your understanding of deprived is...measures tend to be very city focused. So if you're a certain number of miles out, if you're in the suburbs or on the outskirts of a city, the sustainable transport that will be available to you will be drastically different to what might be available further in towards the city", [UK5].

The issue was not simply a UK one – it was also referred to by an Italian participant:

"Many citizens who live in the periphery of the city want to have the same sustainable transport infrastructure that they can find in the city centre. Master plans have to include sustainable transport measures for all the citizens ", [IT1]

This was an emerging issue because the cost of more sustainable private transport such as electric private vehicles could be prohibitive to uptake by people on lower incomes, yet these people also had poorer access to good public transport into cities. There was a growing awareness that measures should be focused to improve access for people from those areas in particular.

Groups with competing interests

The private car versus public transport issue was mentioned on several occasions. Private car owners were seen as an 'interest group' with often competing needs to those without cars or cycle users. This was succinctly expressed by one participant who commented that people with access to cars had a greater level of mobility than those without and that to rebalance the focus sustainably on PT would inevitably disadvantage the car owners, especially those on low incomes living on the periphery of a city. [UK3]

Survey participants in the freight and logistics field also pointed to competing interests between diverse groups citing the impact of better cycling provision, traffic calming and pedestrianisation measures on the needs of car drivers, taxis, residential parking, retail establishments and freight operators.

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[5] The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation in England and is part of a suite of outputs that form the Indices of Deprivation (IoD). It follows an established methodological framework in broadly defining deprivation to encompass a wide range of an individual's living conditions. People may be considered to be living in poverty if they lack the financial resources to meet their needs, whereas people can be regarded as deprived if they lack any kind of resources, not just income. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835115/IoD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf

2.4 Issues of social equity in SUMPS or master plans or in the implementation of sustainable measures

Our third question explored participants' views about how issues of social equity are considered in the development of SUMPS or master plans, or implementation of sustainable transport measures.

The more experienced participants were rather cynical and pointed to many ways in which SUMPS and master plans were *lacking* in consideration of issues of social equity, while the least experienced either answered that they did not know or were optimistic – commenting that awareness of social equity needs had grown.

Among the experts, it was felt that social equity was more likely to be considered in the public sector than the private one (e.g. private housing developments), although even in the public sector, social equity was still just a 'box-ticking' exercise and although LAs did good work on social equality, the relevant departments were often not joined up and not consulted. The point of view of the least experienced group was in contrast with this – they felt that social equity issues *are* considered in SUMP and are translated into practise as providing access for a range of different users with different needs when planning transport service and that awareness of such issues had increased. It was commented that there was variety from place to place – such that some cities had this issue on their political agenda, and it was pushed accordingly. This variety was echoed by experts who had worked across a range of organisations and LAs – that political agendas were of influence in raising the priority of social impacts in planning.

2.5 Factors to consider in transport equity – and of most importance going forward

We asked what factors are considered in their experience of SIA and which were most important to go forward in future. Table 2 shows the factors mentioned as most important with any relevant explanatory notes.

Factor	**Note**
Comprehensive networks are needed to support different types of trip and trip chaining	Less dependency on car and more equitable transport network options
Door to door transport 'ring on demand' for people who cannot use the main system	This exists in Birmingham in West Midlands UK and was mentioned as an example of a more equitable option for those with limited mobility
Relationship of transport to health	i.e., A more social approach based on quality of life, not simply emissions levels

Environment and air quality	It was felt this was of growing importance to the public with issues such as pollution and obesity drawn into sharp focus during the pandemic
Quality of life and participation	These issues were seen as becoming more important (Germany)
Lower income groups do not have enough provision	e.g., concessionary passes
Deprived communities, notably BAME communities	Awareness about this had been recently raised due to the impact of the pandemic
Accessibility and independent mobility	In relation to children, older people and those with restricted mobility, physical and cognitive
Active travel	Need to make walking and cycling more attractive to citizens
Information accessibility	Risk of forgetting people who could not (or did not wish to) access smartphone apps for many reasons
Land use – making 'inaccessible' districts more accessible	Moving away from car-centred travel will over time change land use and businesses will adapt – but the transition is likely to be inequitable.
Young people for whom transport costs can be high in proportion to income	Both concessions and active travel measures felt to be important

Table 2 Factors considered of growing importance in social impact assessment

The most frequently mentioned was 'environmental factors' – mentioned by 8 contributors directly, spanning our experienced and less experienced participants. Although not strictly a 'social' factor this was generally mentioned in connection with the link between transport and health and providing equity for deprived groups, whether living in inner-city areas, or more remote low-income districts. It was difficult to separate out the impact of the COVID 19 lockdown in these answers – but overall, the issues of air quality, and noise were felt to be of increasing importance to quality of life.

One interesting comment described the 'inequity' of current generations having an environmental impact on the climate which would affect the currently disenfranchised 'future

generations', and similarly citizens in other parts of the world who would be affected by climate change created by developed and heavily urbanised nations.

There were also emerging themes about lower income groups, greater accessibility for people with disabilities, and enabling independent travel for children and older people. A further emergent theme was the need to provide better travel equity for people on lower incomes and living in deprived areas, sometimes inner city but particularly in housing areas more remote from the city, which were not well-connected by public transport. It was acknowledged that a transition in land use might also be needed, but transport inequity would continue until this transition could be achieved. A further factor was that young people on lower incomes needed better transport equity to allow them to have better employment opportunities through cheaper access to transport.

Information accessibility was also identified as an issue for the future:

"information accessibility is going to be a very big one, we're moving into a digital age and there's tendency to assume that everyone has access to the internet, or everyone can get apps on their smartphone and there'll be a risk that we forget about those people who don't have the ability to do that. Either through reasons of disability or income, or because they just don't want to, and we risk leaving those people behind. They may be the very people that would actually benefit the most." [UK5]

The people in our study who had less experience of SIA tended to focus on the more 'general' issues including 'the needs and requirements of all citizens'; accessibility; and bringing about a modal shift from reliance on private cars towards public transport and active travel.

2.6 Gathering information on social equity

Overall our participants considered that the appropriate bodies to collect travel needs and social impact data were the LAs and transport departments, with occasional assistance from experts/academia and independent companies.

There was a need for: *"a rich and diverse range of information sources including both primary and secondary research… observations on what's going on in the transport system and working out who is using what, but also better understanding of people's opinions and their personal experiences and priorities as well" [UK3]*

This knowledge could then be made available to developers of schemes and master plans without needing them to collect their own data. Our expert participants also pointed to the potential of gathering data through use of digital media – circulating questionnaires through social media surveys or gaining participation through online fora and portals. A further growing source of information was identified that did not require active participation, through 'big data' and info-mobility apps which provide data on travel patterns from usage data.

As well as gathering information, participants mentioned the value of stakeholder engagement, direct participation, and co-creation: 'getting people round a table', to arrive at solutions that would be appropriate and gain support. It was however felt to be a challenge to move beyond consulting with 'special interest groups' towards wider participation in

actually formulating solutions. The more experienced participants in our survey frequently pointed out the pitfalls of mere 'consultation' with interest groups, which could easily exclude many people, and particularly those in 'hard to reach' groups.

It was pointed out that to make participatory activities work well, expert facilitators were needed and that working with special interest groups required effort:

"The information/requirements/needs of the various target groups should actually be fed into the processes via the relevant associations, e.g. associations for cycling and walking. But you have to pull this out of them, depending on what you need, they are usually not so proactive." [G3]

An interesting observation was made from one UK participant that the data gathered about travel and particularly public transport, through the COVID pandemic period would produce very different figures to 'normal', but that the traffic data which had been collected prior to that time was possibly not going to be the same ever again – or at least for some years, [UK6].

2.7 How did information influence decisions?

There was some focus in responses that information feedback from stakeholders needed to be gathered on a continuous basis. Comments such as: *'More consultations with relevant groups could influence decision making'; 'Gaining knowledge on the issues of the unrepresented people and communication with the society would encourage () to pay more attention and incentives to adjust transport sector to their needs'; a direct link with the city administration and a continuous exchange of views with stakeholders',* all pointed to a need to keep consultation going.

However, there was also a note of pessimism among the more experienced participants. Working with interest groups could easily turn out to be not inclusive, if such groups had a narrow focus and were not good at including the interests of disabled people and hard to reach groups. It was pointed out that often the 'associations' such as cycling and walking campaigns, represented the cause itself and not necessarily the wider interests of including all people.

Despite best efforts at participative consultation, and basing plans on wide information, the experts' voices in our study also emphasised that decisions were ultimately often political as to what groups were targeted for spending, and how resources were distributed. Changing the mind-sets of some of the political decision makers was an important part of furthering social equity in transport outcomes. Unfortunately, these mind-sets could often lag behind what local officers on the ground observed as needs.

The complexity of decision-making was identified, in that decisions could be driven by a number of factors: business cases and strategic needs; political situations where equity for one group was seen as taking something away from another – and could be related to votes; regional and even national focus could require consistency, obscuring local needs and influencing decisions.

'What we do as officers is make recommendations, but decisions are political' [UK3]

"Often, the actual officers, or the day to day people that work at the local authorities understand exactly where we're coming from maybe or can see things differently but it's actually getting those people in the position of being decision makers to change their mind because it's more difficult." [UK6]

2.8 Involving citizens

Some of our participants were proud of the level of public participation that had occurred during SUMP which was an improvement over levels of participation in earlier planning. These were from cities that had been involved in a wider range of citizen participation activities (e.g., Rome) than they had done previously. One of our German participants emphasised that although public participation was a long-established part of urban planning, this was not the case with transportation which had traditionally been carried out with little public participation, but which municipalities had been required to deal with more intensively within the SUMP process.

Other contributors were rather cynical, emphasising the barriers to inclusive participation, and an awareness of the difficulties involved in getting timing, location and nature of the engagement targeted at a wide range of people – but ensuring the inclusion of under-represented groups. It was well-recognised that participants at 'Citizens events' were people with the time available, and well-developed opinions who may not represent groups with disabilities or social disadvantages.

There was a sense of frustration voiced when participation or consultation events organised with the best attempts at choosing times and locations, had resulted in a low level of interest. It seemed here that LAs need to be able to draw on more creative approaches to reach those 'hard to reach' people to whom their best efforts at consultation had not appealed. The danger of a 'failed' participative approach is that it creates a self-fulfilling cycle of failure – perhaps radical new approaches are needed from external specialists to analyse what went wrong and how to improve it. Table 3 outlines the barriers that were identified with some explanatory notes.

Barriers to involving citizens

Barriers to involving citizens	Notes
Limited imaginations about solutions	
Competing interests result in some groups frequently being 'sidelined'	e.g. older people
Limited time and resources for social impact work	
Low public awareness of participation processes	
Lack of interest by public	
Barriers to the use of technology where opinions	e.g., older people, but includes many

are requested through online participation	others, e.g. young people with limited data or no phone
Distrust between citizens and local authority	
Format used for participation activities can exclude many groups.	e.g., timing of event in the evening excludes shift workers, women, families, people with reduced mobility
Skills needed to do effective consultations	
Perceived Difficulties connected with explaining transport complexity to citizens	
Perceived difficulties with the large scale of opinions collected from public consultation activities	Perceived lack of resource to process the opinions.
Providing information. People either do not find out about consultations or do not understand how it affects them or why they should be involved.	
Discouragement within LA's by attempts at consultation which had produced very low responses.	Respondents pointed to frustration that events held at what they thought a good location at a good time or even all day were not attended.
Public perception that their view is not going to be valued: "it's a done deal; it's to tell us about what they're doing rather than to ask what we think and genuinely influence."	
Improving engagement with citizens: providing better opportunities to engage;	Participants felt that the way of engaging with people, as in making sure that there is an opportunity, be it in terms of communication and time of day and day of week for having a chance of being integral to that conversation, needed to change.

Table 3: Barriers to involving citizens

Beyond mere cynicism, and sometimes frustration at the difficulties encountered, a large number of ways to improve involvement were mentioned, outlined in Table 4.

"Engagement with citizens is something we have struggled with, we have had opportunities to engage in things like citizens panels and we have the 'young combined authority' a great forum to engage, and you can set up groups for representing particular disadvantaged groups in society to look at their issues."[WM]

Also mentioned was 'partnership work' with stakeholder groups with links to deprived and 'hard to reach' groups, collaborating with other organisations.

There was also a recognition that doing better participative work needed resources and that here it was of course important to have the buy-in of the Mayor, to secure funding for activities, skills development and access to expert facilitation, perhaps by third parties.

Improving Citizen Involvement:

Use radical methods that expose people to a wide range of analyses and opinions – citizen jury approach [UK1]
Convincing people of a local approach and local influence – e.g., Manchester city had overall control of buses independent of central government [UK2]
Employ/work with Individuals who can bring groups together – people who can 'talk to disparate groups'
The buy-in of the Mayor – can secure funding for co-creation activities and skills
Establishing an ongoing dialogue with groups - a dialog which doesn't put all the focus on the LA but spreads it out amongst the people…end up with better results, [UK2]
Awareness of the very local level – and how this shapes perceptions - What people see at the end of the day from transport planning is the microscopic level of stuff, a crossing, new bus, wider pavement, dual carriageway, [UK2]
Better and wider advertising of consultations activities
Use accessible language and materials
Make feedback easy to give
Provide materials and information which is suitable for addressing socially disadvantaged people and people with disabilities
Creative ideas about approaching issues and people (e.g. a media illustration of how fire brigade could not access buildings because of 'wild parking' was a great way of raising awareness about parking management.) [G2]
Promote the value of attending a meeting – so that participants get something out of it

Promote the understanding that people actually need to give their opinion, it is really wanted
Reaching a wider range of people – e.g. city festivals, shopping centres, job centres, colleges, schools, youth unemployment teams, care leavers, door knocking, councillors, stakeholders that work with groups daily
More engagement with BAME communities, young people, isolated, vulnerable people
Engage more with women
Understand range of groups and ways of working with them

Table 4: Improving citizen involvement

2.9 The future - A shift in thinking?

We asked participants if there had been a shift in thinking about social impacts. The responses were rather mixed, although generally most considered there certainly had been a shift among the society in general. Those participants that were more experienced in focusing on social impact commented on a growing awareness among the public about 'sustainability and transport' and its social implications. This was linked particularly to a growing awareness of climate change issues, and to a heightened awareness of health issues such as obesity and emissions or pollution. This growing awareness of social impact of transport was thought to be incidental to the growing campaigns globally about climate and health, rather than linked to any active campaigning from the transport side.

The effect of the pandemic lockdown was pertinent to many answers along the lines of 'this has raised awareness about the quality of life related to the social and environmental impacts of transport'. Several commented that this had accelerated a shift in thinking that had begun previously, towards a focus on the needs of people and quality of life, by implication moving away from older models that had focused on just the economic needs.

The pandemic had provided some novel insights into transport needs – such as that the mobility of caregivers (buying and transporting food, caring for people, children and elders) has emerged as having greater importance than 'mobility to work'.

However, opinions also emphasised there was a long way to go. There was some concern that politicians were always lagging behind citizens in these shifts. It was suggested by many of our participants that the pandemic lockdowns had accelerated a growth in awareness in the short term, about the importance of transport, its link with quality of life, health and lower emissions – but would it continue? One of the transport planning consultants interviewed in our study mentioned the company had now started working with a human factors and behavioural specialist – recognising the importance of 'thinking about people, what their activities are and the places that they live, work and need to be in or want to be in.'

One comment suggested that transport experts had always been aware of these things – so where was the shift in thinking? From our comments collected, including from the less experienced commentators, it seems at least likely that SIA will be easier to justify in future planning activities and that experts can point to a groundswell of public opinion which might prove a more fertile ground for promoting change, and securing citizen engagement. It was also noted by some participants that the Media had also gained a greater awareness and interest in transport impact during the lockdowns and that they hoped for greater interest and more informed and sustainability-focused reporting in future.

2.10 What had caused this shift?

Because our survey took place in the summer of 2020, predictably the pandemic was identified as a big accelerator. Now people had tasted the flexibility of home working and easy online home meetings, some (those who could) would be keen to keep working this way – and this fed into an appreciation of the importance of 'active travel' and its benefit to quality of life.

In the field of transport planning itself, a more multi-disciplinary approach was identified by one participant, pointing to an observed change in the background of trainee transport planners, with a more diverse background wider than engineering or economics – more designers, architects, and social geographers. If wider backgrounds continued to be reflected in recruitment, this would be contributing to change in the way experts worked and the issues they considered important.

Five respondents cited that the worsening quality of life in urban areas with increased pollution and congestion, was the main reason for a growing awareness among the public that a change in thinking was needed. Others could point to campaigns and actions of local and national government to raise public awareness, such as providing incentives for cleaner vehicles, promoting campaigns such as European Mobility Week and other local measures which were aimed at bringing about a shift in local thinking.

Climate change awareness was also cited as influential in bringing about this change, raising the awareness of the impact of transport emissions in particular.

On an optimistic note, there was also a view expressed by some that 'generation change' and 'modern thinking' also contributed to a growing awareness of the importance of 'quality of life', cleaner technology, better systems with improved information and greater accessibility, and inclusivity.

2.11 Conclusions and Recommendations

The social impact of transport is a key and growing area of concern. Those participants in our survey who were more experienced in 'hands-on' Social Impact Assessment commented on a growing awareness among the public about 'sustainability and transport' and its social implications.

The pandemic and its observed effects had accelerated a shift in thinking that had begun earlier, towards a focus on people's needs and quality of life, by implication moving away from older models of transport that had focused on just the economic needs of mobility.

Most of our respondents, (and importantly this included those 'less experienced') observed there was a need to improve at citizen engagement in transport planning, such as being more inclusive, maintaining a dialogue of continuous feedback and finding ways to overcome the barriers to citizen involvement mentioned above. The level of citizen participation elicited during SUMP planning had been a positive experience for some but had also raised awareness that assessing social impact and involving citizens in planning could be done better.

We recommend that SIA has the potential to be transformed from a transport-planning tool to one that engages people and can be used as a tool to reduce transport poverty in line with integrated master plans.

There is a clear opportunity to use and design participatory activities around SIA, and to use this in the wider context of urban transport planning – linking transport to environmental, health, social and economic master plans, and playing a greater part in all stages of the SUMP process. SUMP provides the structure for continuous feedback and improvement, engaging in participatory activities as part of a continuous SIA process, through participatory feedback and co-creation of new solutions, in terms of assessing social impacts and continuing strategies to reduce transport poverty. These findings build on those of earlier work carried out during the SUITS project in the field of social impact assessment (Woodcock, 2018, 2019 and Woodcock et al, 2020).

3 References

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Appendix A: Interview questions

Background questions

First I want to ask about your role and about any experience you have of assessing inclusivity transport plans.

a) What is your current occupation and place of work?
b) What is your area of interest in regard to transport?
c) Can you describe your role briefly?

   Prompt: Does your role include any of the following responsibilities or expertise?

   Legal (e.g. lawyer) / Security / Operations management / Ethics / Public relations / Transport management / procurement / NGOs / charity groups

   Other – please explain
d) Have you had any experience in assessing the inclusivity, social, health or environmental impacts of transport? Can you tell me what?

   Prompt: what was the scale and focus of the impact assessment and your role in it?

Opinion questions:

Now I have some questions about your opinions:

1. *How do you think sustainable transport measures affect different groups in your city? (this could be your "town/ region" if that is more relevant to your role and experience)*

2. *Are you concerned by this as an individual or in your professional role?*

3. *In your experience, to what extent do you think issues of social equity are considered in the development of SUMPS or master plans, or implementation of sustainable transport measures,*

4. *What issues are considered – and which do you think are of most importance going forward?*

5. *Who should gather this information and how?*

6. *How could/does it inform decision-making?*

7. *How are citizens involved in planning new transport measures? What are the barriers, could this be improved?*

8. *Do you think there has been a shift towards more thinking about the relationship between transport and quality of life? If so…What has caused this shift?*

9. *Can you give concrete examples of where this has made a difference?*

That's all the opinion questions – Is there anything you would like to add about assessing social impact?

Finally, I have a few demographic questions – answering is optional

1. Gender: Male / Female / other / prefer not to say

2. Age at last birthday:

Or what age grouping?

Under 20
21 to 30
31 to 40
41 to 50
51 to 60
61+

3. Country of residence:

Thank You - *That's the end of the interview,*

Thank you very much for your time today, it has been really helpful for our research.