

General article:

CIVITAS FORUM Conference 2004 focuses on a New Mobility Culture

Product, enabling measures and communication are key to success

From 17 - 19 November the Dutch city of Rotterdam hosted the successful CIVITAS FORUM Conference 2004. About two hundred European professionals in the field of transport and infrastructure gathered in Rotterdam to exchange knowledge, learn, discuss current issues and meet with colleagues from other CIVITAS FORUM cities. The conference focussed on a New Mobility Culture.

Through lectures, demonstrations and workshops visitors were brought up to date with current findings in research on mobility culture. During the conference observers, with different backgrounds and fields of expertise, had been asked to attend the workshops and provide the FORUM with feedback, which was presented during the final plenary session. "It is motivating to hear that not everything is always running smoothly, both best and worse practices are useful for benchmarking purposes," observer Rick Ruvolo from the city of San Francisco said.

Product

The main themes throughout the conference were products, enabling measures and communication. First, the product has to be right. The modern day consumer will choose the (mobility) product which best suits their needs and preferences. This is not always the product that is best for the city, as several cities showed in their presentation. Many cities were happy to share information about how they tackled this problems. Others, who hadn't found a solution yet, were eager to find out if they could maybe learn from other cities. "Cities are very enthusiastic on the subject of mobility culture, but citizens often are not," concluded an observer at the end of the conference. "We have to monitor their behaviour and preferences."

Enabling measures

During the conference it became clear that lack of courage to take difficult decisions and commitment by politicians is still a problem. "Transport will always be on the front page of every local paper in Europe. Doing nothing is not an option," said chair of the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) Helen Holland on this topic. "We have to encourage European politicians to not be afraid of making waves. They need to sweep away old restrictions and support innovations in developing new concepts." The statement taken in the final plenary session underlined this point of view: "decision-makers need encouragement to look beyond their mandate. Being 'ahead of the pack' almost always means taking risks."

Communication

Last, but not least, special attention was given to communication and marketing measures as part of an integrated urban transport policy. The conference showed this area is still underdeveloped in the mobility management sector. Communication is one of the most important factors for promoting sustainable mobility and development. Product supply alone is not enough to trigger the interest of the modern consumer. New techniques based upon best practices in other sectors are needed for the emergence of a new sustainable mobility culture. One of the conclusions presented in the final plenary session stated that "dissemination, marketing and communication should be mandatory in all EU projects".

CIVITAS Awards

During this year's conference, for the first time in the history of the annual CIVITAS FORUM, the Policy Advice Committee issued three awards for excellent initiatives in the field of Clean Urban Transport. PAC's Helen Holland and Dutch Minister of Transport Mrs. Peijs presented the coveted awards to the cities of La Rochelle (New Mobility Culture Leadership for a CIVITAS Forum member), Aalborg (New Mobility Culture Leadership for a CIVITAS demonstrator city) and Göteborg (CIVITAS City of the year). The three cities were proud to have won these awards. "We are especially proud because the winners are chosen by the other CIVITAS members," said Jean-Marie Grellier of La Rochelle.

Rotterdam

When participants were not busy attending workshops or networking they had ample opportunity to visit Rotterdam. The city proved to be an ideal setting for this Forum meeting. In its role as the coordinator of the TELLUS project it has gained useful experience in preparing the ground for a new mobility culture. Over the last two and a half years no less than 26 projects in the city have been carried out in the context of TELLUS, such as Rotterdam's Fileplan (congestion plan) and Greenwheels (car-sharing). As in all TELLUS projects these initiatives focus on durability and innovation. "Rotterdam is a lovely city," participant Elizabeth Kracker from Berlin said. "Not only because of many initiatives in the field of infrastructure, but also because of the city's modern architecture." Alderman Stephan Hulman (Transport and Culture), who also attended the CIVITAS FORUM, was eager to present his guests with ample suggestions of places to visit.