Lessons from a mobility smart city living lab triggering new governance practices at the urban level

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For the past years, cities have been devoting considerable efforts to reduce individual car use and favour diffusion of public transport and soft mobility, especially by allocating funds for new cycling infrastructures and improving bus/train inter-changes. Although necessary to promote a transition in the dominant mobility patterns, such structural and regulatory tools are not sufficient to make a change. Acknowledging this gap, the City of Bellinzona (Southern Switzerland) opted for also exploring the effectiveness of cognitive-motivational tools, by means of a smartphone app aimed at automatically tracking individual mobility patterns and rewarding sustainable choices.

With the trigger of a EU research funding, the development of such an app turned into a bottom-up participatory, community-level activity, instead of being appointed to external expert companies, coherently with the traditional expert-lead top-down approach to whom the City was used. In fact, the City built on the experience gained in similar experiments previously run in the same area, which had shown two main limitations:

• *preaching to the converted*: such apps mainly attract citizens with high environmental awareness, thus not being representative of average citizens;

• *high drop-out rates and early abandon*: level of engagement of smartphone app users decreases over time: frequently users quit using apps before they have modified their mobility patterns.

To overcome such limitations and favour enduring and large scale diffusion of the app, the City opted for:

• sustaining app use with a set of tangible prizes (extrinsic motivational factors), directly targeting mainstream citizens who otherwise would not show any interest in the app;

• opening-up the design of the app main contents and functionalities to the citizens themselves, under the hypothesis that, if they own the tool, they will be stimulated to use it for a longer period of time and promote its diffusion among their circle of family and friends.

Therefore, in early 2017 citizens of Bellinzona were invited to join the Bellidea living lab (six monthly meetings) and co-design the Bellidea smartphone app aimed at promoting sustainable mobility patterns among their peers. The Bellidea app prototype is currently underway, based on all the elements co-designed in the living lab by researchers, developers, public administration and citizens. Launch of the final Bellidea app to the whole population is planned for late Spring 2018.

Positive impacts are expected to go well beyond mobility. In fact, the adopted design of the living lab process allows to enlarge scope and complexity of the discussion (upscaling), moving from a debate about an app to a participatory decision-making process regarding future local mobility scenarios and their possible policy implications, respectively. The Bellidea living lab in fact provides the City with new channels to interact with the citizens: real-life mobility data collected by the app provides “smart”, more meaningful and segment-oriented information to policymakers. In turn, this can be actively analyzed and discussed with citizens, thus bringing new energies, ideas and points of view into the design of future mobility scenarios. And if the whole Bellidea approach proves successful, the City will be endowed with a new set of governance practices, applicable to future decision-making processes in other fields than mobility.