QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT SYSTEMS AS THE CRUX OF SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

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ABSTRACT

The quality in the public transport is a matter that has been developed recently and that, after a phase of normalization from which norm UNE-EN 13816 has been derived, is in a process of implantation in management systems of operating companies and public administrations in charge of transport planning. Nevertheless, the magnitude and the complexity of public transport systems complicate the correct application of quality directives from the norm, resulting often in a disparity of actions and standards that do not contribute to improve the produced quality nor the global perception of clients.

For that reason, quality improvement must be structured suitably to include all the elements that integrate the public transport, from the planning stages to operational control, with the objective of adapting to client requirements. It is essential to define a suitable regulatory frame, using laws and contracts that guarantee the attainment of quality objectives. This regulatory frame must enhance coordinated participation and cooperation of all the stakeholders to improve reliability and effectiveness of the system, but also to avoid responsibility problems. Integration of administration representatives and operators in unique organisms, concerning information, fare policy, official notice management, planning and operation… is an essential element of improvement that at the moment is only reflected partially in some metropolitan areas.

Since road public transport does not require the construction of an own route and has different operation modalities that adapt it to all type of demands, is a faster and more economically viable solution than the railway transport to approach quality problems in public transport systems. For that reason, the present study has focused much more in this type of transport as the crux of the quality improvements. This does not prevent the development and the continuous improvement of the railway sector; on the contrary, coordinating both sectors (at infrastructure planning, design and operation of networks, quality, etc.) the global improvement of the whole public transport system can be optimized.

If quality improvements in public transport systems are coordinated with private vehicle restrictive policies and land use planning, sustainable mobility scenarios can be reached. In addition, it is important that participation of specialized social and economic agents of society takes place at the planning stages to adapt services to client necessities.

The proposed improvement model shows different elements of the public transport system, defines quality objectives and establishes actions to undertake, always starting off standards established by norm UNE-EN 13816. The main improvement tools are explained in detail, including field studies, planning instruments and management procedures. Their application to Catalonia’s situation results in a series of improvements in the regional network directed to equip it with fast and efficient services from the operational and social points of view. It is important to remember that isolated improvements in each scope (information, time, accessibility…) do not tend to improve the global perception of clients, and for that reason it is essential to coordinate the advances in quality in each scope so that the rate of improvement is the suitable one.